PUBLIC-POLICY RESEARCH REPORT

Beyond the Numbers

Violence, Survival, and the Unequal Conditions Behind the Statistics

COMPLETE MANUSCRIPT — PUBLIC-INTEREST EDITION

Anonymous

August 2026

Reader's Note

This report addresses a subject that is frequently reduced to slogans. It does not deny racial disparities in serious violence, explain them away as nothing more than biased data, or treat them as evidence of an inherent racial tendency. Its purpose is to identify what different data sources measure, examine the environments in which violence is concentrated, connect social conditions to plausible psychological and behavioral mechanisms, and show where personal agency and institutional responsibility remain essential.

The report is designed for several audiences at once. Researchers should be able to identify the claims, sources, limits, and questions requiring stronger causal evidence. Policymakers and practitioners should find a practical prevention framework. Journalists and general readers should be able to distinguish a valid statistic from an invalid inference. People living in communities heavily affected by violence should see victimization and safety treated as central concerns rather than as footnotes in an ideological debate.

Central Finding

Racial disparities in violent-crime measures are real descriptive patterns, but race is not an adequate causal explanation. The stronger explanation lies in unequal exposure to concentrated disadvantage, violence, institutional weakness, criminal-justice contact, limited opportunity, and chronic threat across places and generations. Those conditions can encourage survival-oriented adaptations; they do not dictate behavior, excuse harm, or describe most members of any group.

What This Report Does Not Claim

- It does not claim that poverty automatically causes violence.
- It does not claim that all racial disparities disappear after statistical adjustment.
- It does not claim that policing bias accounts for every difference in homicide or robbery.
- It does not claim that people who experience adversity lack moral agency.
- It does not claim that a broad racial group shares one culture, neighborhood, or behavioral pattern.

Executive Summary

Public arguments about race and violent crime commonly begin with a percentage and stop before asking what the percentage represents. One historical FBI table reported that Black adults accounted for 51.3 percent of adult murder arrests in 2019. That is a real and important statistic. It is also a measure of arrests in a specified reporting system and year—not a census of all offending, a description of Black Americans generally, or a mechanism explaining why violence occurs. The same table showed that males accounted for 88 percent of murder arrests, yet sex composition is rarely treated with the same simplistic causal language.

The first finding of this report is therefore methodological: offense reports, arrests, known-offender records, convictions, incarceration counts, mortality data, and victimization surveys answer different questions. The National Crime Victimization Survey captures many nonfatal crimes whether or not they were reported to police, but it excludes homicide and relies on victims' perceptions for offender characteristics. Homicide data capture lethal events more completely than many other crimes, but offender information is often unknown. Arrest data reflect offending, detection, reporting, clearance, enforcement, and agency participation at the same time.

The second finding is substantive. Serious violence is highly concentrated by age, sex, place, social network, and life circumstance. Racial categories partly mark unequal exposure to those conditions because American housing, labor, education, wealth, and criminal-justice systems have distributed opportunity and risk unevenly. Concentrated disadvantage is more than low individual income. It describes the clustering of poverty, unemployment, instability, diminished institutional capacity, and social isolation in places that must also absorb repeated violence and loss.

The third finding is psychological and developmental. Exposure to recurring danger can produce vigilance, distrust, rapid threat interpretation, weapon carrying for perceived self-protection, sensitivity to disrespect, retaliatory expectations, and short time horizons. This report calls those responses survival adaptations. The term is descriptive rather than celebratory: an adaptation can reduce perceived short-term vulnerability while increasing long-term danger for the individual and community. The final insult, dispute, or loss may function as a precipitant in a system already carrying a heavy cumulative load.

The fourth finding is that adversity is not destiny. Most people experiencing poverty, discrimination, trauma, or neighborhood violence do not commit serious violent offenses. Stable relationships, effective caregivers, school attachment, employment, faith and civic organizations,

future orientation, collective efficacy, treatment, and credible institutions can interrupt the pathway. A theory that explains only offending but not resilience is incomplete.

The fifth finding is policy-oriented. Prevention and accountability should not be treated as competing camps. Communities need immediate protection from people and networks at acute risk of shooting, while also needing fewer conditions that repeatedly produce that risk. Evidence supports a portfolio: focused interventions for the small number of people closest to lethal violence; hospital and street outreach; improved homicide clearance and procedural legitimacy; youth development and family support; environmental remediation; educational and employment opportunity; and data systems capable of measuring safety without relying exclusively on arrests.

The report's overall conclusion is neither that "the numbers are racist" nor that "the numbers prove race is the cause." The numbers show unequal burdens of offending, victimization, and justice-system contact. Explanation requires moving from racial categories to the conditions, institutions, networks, and decisions underneath them. That move makes the problem more complex, but it also makes prevention possible.

Authorship and Research Disclosure

This manuscript was developed through AI-assisted research, synthesis, drafting, and design. The sponsoring author has chosen to remain anonymous. The central quantitative claims and foundational citations were checked against the original government tables or primary research identified in the source notes. This remains a research synthesis rather than original empirical research or a peer-reviewed systematic review; independent expert review is required before academic submission or authoritative policy use.

Evidence Status

Claim type	Standard used in this edition
National statistics	Checked against the cited FBI, BJS, CDC, or Census table; denominator, year, and selected population stated.
Causal effects	Reserved for randomized or credible quasi-experimental evidence and accompanied by design limits.
Associations	Described as associations; residual confounding and measurement limits remain explicit.
Conceptual model	Labeled as synthesis or hypothesis rather than presented as a measured biological or psychological law.
Policy recommendations	Presented as a portfolio with implementation safeguards, not as guaranteed effects.

Key Findings at a Glance

Finding	Label	Meaning
1	Measurement matters	The racial composition of arrests cannot be substituted for the racial composition of all offending.
2	Violence is concentrated	A small number of places, networks, situations, and life periods account for a disproportionate share of severe harm.
3	Race is a marker, not a mechanism	Racial categories often index unequal exposure to social and institutional conditions; they do not explain behavior by themselves.
4	Threat changes behavior	Violence exposure is associated with weapon carrying, distress, substance use, and other risk responses, although cross-sectional evidence cannot prove every causal step.
5	Controls clarify but do not magically settle	Age, sex, household resources, neighborhood conditions, prior exposure, and justice contact must be modeled carefully; some controls are themselves products of earlier inequality.
6	Resilience is the majority outcome	Most exposed individuals remain nonviolent, making protective factors central rather than peripheral.
7	Safety requires a portfolio	Focused accountability, legitimacy, environmental prevention, youth opportunity, and trauma response work best as complements.

Contents

Chapter	Title
1	The Question Behind the Statistics
2	What Crime Data Actually Measure
3	The Historical Production of Unequal Place
4	Poverty, Place, and the Concentration of Violence
5	Survival Adaptation and Chronic Threat
6	The Breaking-Point Model
7	Development, Family, Peers, Schools, and Work
8	Policing, Legitimacy, and Measurement Distortion
9	What Happens When Relevant Factors Are Controlled
10	Comparisons Across Race and Place
11	Responsibility, Resilience, and Desistance
12	Counterarguments and Competing Explanations
13	A Policy Portfolio for Safety and Equity
14	Homicide Victimization, Firearms, and Circumstance
15	How Strong Is the Environmental Evidence?
16	Case Studies in Prevention and Implementation
17	Boundaries, Limitations, and Unanswered Questions
18	Conclusion: What the Numbers Mean
A–N	Technical Appendices and References

CHAPTER 1

The Question Behind the Statistics

A number can be correct while the conclusion attached to it is wrong.

Race-and-crime arguments often begin with a national population share and compare it with an arrest share. The rhetorical force comes from the difference between the two. But a population comparison mixes children, older adults, men, women, neighborhoods with radically different conditions, and people at very different stages of exposure and opportunity. Serious violence is concentrated among young men far more than among the population at large. Any analysis that ignores age and sex composition begins with a denominator problem before it reaches race.

The widely repeated "half of murders" claim is usually derived from an FBI arrest or known-offender table. In the 2019 arrest table, Black adults represented 51.3 percent of adults arrested for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, White adults 45.7 percent, and other races 3.0 percent. The figure deserves examination, not denial. Yet its correct grammatical subject is "adult murder arrests recorded in the table," not "Black people." Arrests are events produced after a homicide, investigation, identification, probable-cause decision, and agency report. Some cases are not cleared; some suspects are misidentified; multiple arrests may be connected to an event; and reporting coverage varies.

Homicide nevertheless cannot be dismissed as a mere enforcement artifact. It produces a death certificate, receives more investigative attention than many offenses, and is represented in mortality and police systems. Black Americans, especially young Black men, have experienced extraordinarily high homicide victimization. The same communities stigmatized through offender statistics have also carried disproportionate grief. That fact changes the moral frame: honest analysis is not an accusation against a population but an attempt to understand why preventable death is so unequally concentrated.

Robbery illustrates why offense-specific analysis matters. In Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates aggregated across 2017–2021, Black people experienced robbery victimization at 2.8 per 1,000, Hispanic people at 2.5, and non-Hispanic White people at 1.6. Yet total nonfatal violent-victimization rates for White, Black, and Hispanic people were much closer: 19.8, 19.4, and 18.4 per 1,000. Simple assault was higher for White people than for Black or Hispanic people in that

period. One aggregate statement about “violent crime” obscures meaningful variation among offenses.

The central analytic rule is simple: describe the measurement before explaining it. Is the unit an offense, victim, arrest, person, incident, conviction, prison admission, or survey estimate? Is the denominator the total population, the age-eligible population, people exposed to a specific context, or arrests for the offense? Is the racial classification self-identified, assigned by police, perceived by a victim, or drawn from an administrative record? What fraction of cases has unknown information? Without these answers, a precise-looking number may support an imprecise claim.

Description and causation must also be separated. A racial category can predict an outcome because it is correlated with a set of exposures without being the operative cause. If Black children are more likely to grow up in neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage and recurrent violence, race can statistically predict later outcomes even when the causal mechanisms involve exposure, institutions, networks, and decisions. Treating the marker as the mechanism mistakes the social sorting process for an inherent group trait.

The objective is not to force every observed disparity to zero through statistical adjustment. Some differences may remain after available controls, and measurement error may affect both outcomes and explanatory variables. The objective is to determine how the association changes across better comparisons, whether proposed mechanisms are supported, and which explanations generate interventions that actually reduce harm.

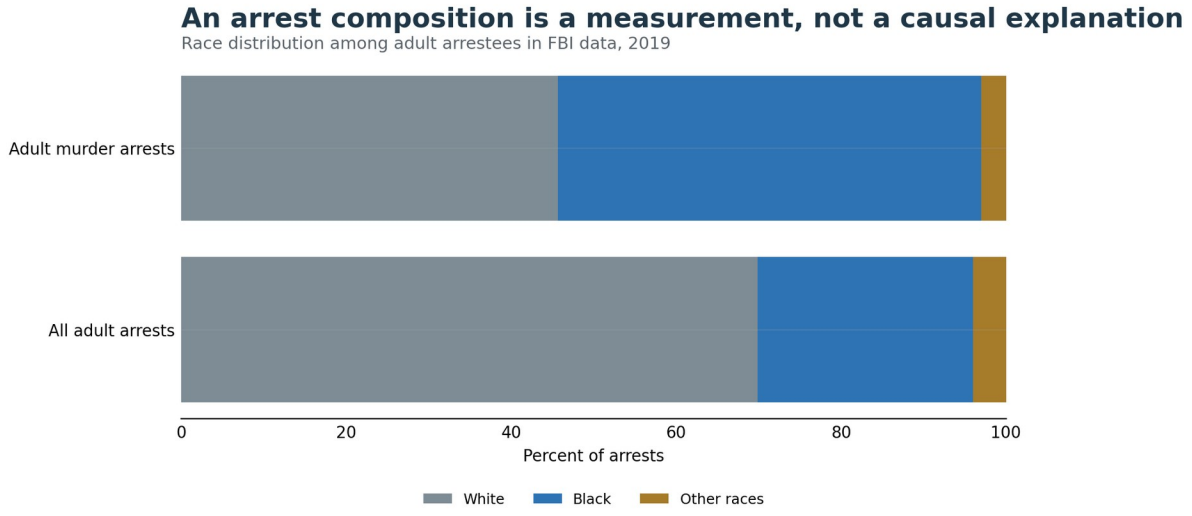

Figure 1. Arrest composition depends strongly on the offense category.

Source: FBI, Crime in the United States, 2019, Table 43. Percentages are among recorded adult arrests, not population offending rates.

The moral stakes

Two failures are common. The first is racial essentialism: treating a group disparity as evidence that members of the group share a violent disposition. The second is evasive minimization: refusing to discuss severe violence because the statistics can be weaponized. Both failures harm communities facing the highest victimization. The appropriate response is empirical seriousness joined to moral clarity—protect victims, hold individuals accountable, reject collective blame, and investigate the conditions that make lethal events more likely.

CHAPTER 2

What Crime Data Actually Measure

The strongest conclusion comes from triangulation, not from treating one database as reality itself.

The United States does not possess a complete register of crime. Crime is partly hidden behavior. Each measurement system observes a different selection process. Police data begin with events that are discovered or reported, classified as offenses, recorded by an agency, and submitted to a larger system. Victimization surveys begin with sampled households and respondents willing and able to recall experiences. Health records begin with injury or death. Court and correctional records begin still later, after charging, adjudication, and sentencing.

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting tradition and modern Crime Data Explorer provide essential national information, but transitions among summary reporting, NIBRS, and estimation methods complicate comparisons. Agency participation and data quality vary. Police-reported violent crime is best interpreted as serious events known to law enforcement under specified definitions. Arrest data are especially sensitive to clearance, investigative resources, police presence, suspect identification, and enforcement priorities.

The National Crime Victimization Survey is indispensable because it includes nonfatal crimes reported and not reported to police. It asks about rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, and property crimes. It does not include homicide because the victim cannot be interviewed. It excludes some populations, including people in institutions and young children. Offender race and ethnicity come from victims' perceptions, which may be uncertain or affected by visibility, stress, and multiple-offender incidents.

Mortality systems provide a strong count of deaths and permit age-adjusted and demographic rates. They are less capable of describing offender characteristics, motives, networks, or justice processing. Hospital and emergency-department systems capture nonfatal injuries but vary in coding and geographic coverage. None alone can answer whether a disparity originates in exposure, behavior, reporting, enforcement, medical survival, or case clearance.

A national percentage also conceals local concentration. Two cities with the same racial composition may have very different homicide rates, and two neighborhoods within the same city may experience radically different levels of danger. National aggregation can produce an apparent

"racial" relationship that weakens when place and local conditions are modeled. Conversely, neighborhood comparisons can hide individual differences or selection into neighborhoods. Both ecological and individual-level fallacies must be avoided.

Uncertainty belongs in the main text. Survey estimates have standard errors and confidence intervals. Small subgroups can generate unstable estimates. Administrative tables contain unknown race, missing relationship information, and incomplete agency participation. A dagger or caution symbol is not a technical decoration; it tells the reader how much confidence to place in a difference. Graphs in this report therefore identify their source, period, denominator, and major limitation.

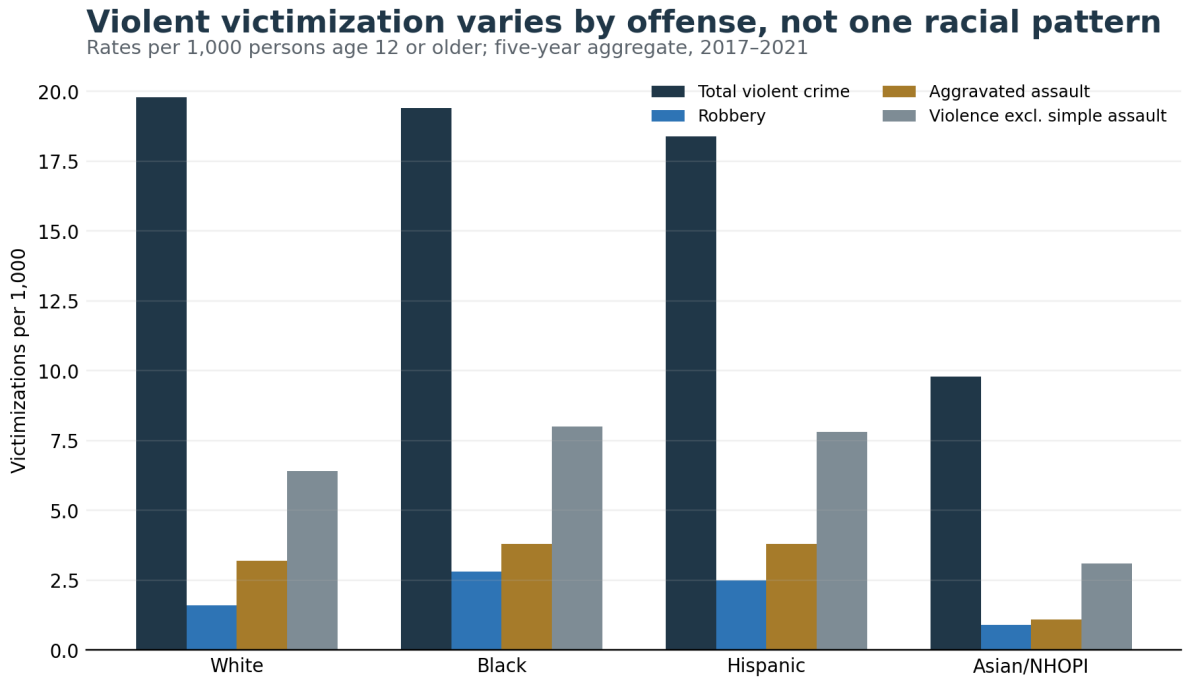

Figure 2. Offense-specific victimization rates complicate a single racial narrative.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017–2021. Homicide is excluded; racial groups are non-Hispanic and Hispanic may be of any race.

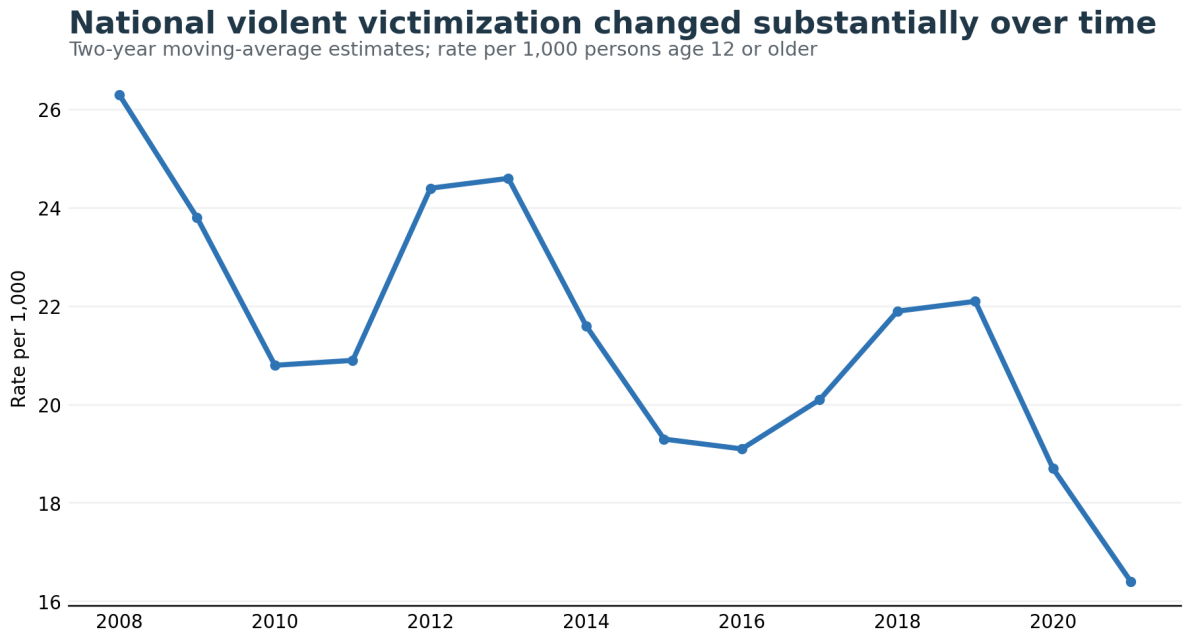

Figure 3. Violent victimization is historically variable.

Source: BJS, NCVS, 2008–2021. Estimates are two-year moving averages; apparent year-to-year differences should be interpreted with standard errors.

A hierarchy of claims

Claim type	What it permits	What it cannot establish
Descriptive	States what a defined dataset recorded	Why the pattern exists
Adjusted association	Compares groups after measured covariates	Removal of unmeasured confounding
Longitudinal	Establishes ordering and change over time	Causality without stronger identification
Quasi-experimental	Uses a plausible natural comparison	Universal generalization
Randomized intervention	Estimates treatment effect in studied conditions	Mechanism or transfer to every context

CHAPTER 3

The Historical Production of Unequal Place

Contemporary neighborhood conditions did not arise randomly, and history operates through present-day institutions.

A structural explanation is not a claim that the past mechanically determines the present. It is an account of how earlier policies shaped durable distributions of wealth, housing, infrastructure, schools, tax bases, and exposure. Racially restrictive covenants, discriminatory mortgage markets, redlining, urban renewal, highway construction, exclusionary zoning, and uneven public investment affected where families could live and accumulate property. Later deindustrialization removed stable employment from many urban communities already constrained by segregation.

The relevant mechanism is cumulative. Home equity finances education, business formation, residential mobility, and intergenerational transfers. When a population is excluded from appreciating housing markets or steered into neighborhoods subject to disinvestment, the consequence is not limited to one generation's address. It affects family wealth, municipal resources, school opportunity, exposure to environmental hazards, and the ability to leave deteriorating conditions.

Historical redlining is not identical to every present-day disadvantage, and modern associations should not be interpreted as a single uninterrupted causal chain. Cities changed, some redlined neighborhoods gentrified, and federal policy altered lending practices. Still, multi-city studies report associations between historical lending grades and contemporary firearm injury or violent death. The responsible conclusion is that historical classification is one indicator of durable spatial inequality, not a stand-alone explanation for every shooting.

Segregation matters because it concentrates conditions. If poverty were evenly dispersed, disadvantaged households would more often share institutions, public space, schools, and political constituencies with affluent households. Concentration creates a compound exposure: fewer job networks, greater residential instability, strained organizations, more visible disorder, repeated victimization, and less capacity to absorb shocks. A household's income cannot capture those contextual effects.

Criminal-justice policy also altered neighborhood structure. High incarceration rates removed adults, disrupted relationships and earnings, and later returned people with barriers to work and

housing. At the same time, residents relied on law enforcement for protection from serious violence. This produced a double bind: communities could experience under-protection from shootings and overexposure to intrusive enforcement. History therefore enters the present through both social conditions and institutional legitimacy.

The structural account should not erase local leadership or portray communities as passive. Churches, mutual-aid networks, neighborhood groups, violence interrupters, educators, parents, and residents have continually created safety under constrained conditions. Their work demonstrates that neighborhood effects are not destiny and that institutional capacity can be built. It also warns policymakers against designing interventions without community knowledge.

A fair historical chapter must address change. Crime rates rose and fell dramatically over periods when racial composition changed more slowly. The national decline in violence during the 1990s and later variation across cities show that environments, markets, policing, demography, technology, and behavior are dynamic. If race were an intrinsic cause, these large within-group and within-place changes would be difficult to explain.

From history to testable mechanisms

1. Historical exclusion → lower wealth and constrained residential choice.
2. Constrained choice → higher exposure to concentrated disadvantage and violence.
3. Concentrated exposure → weaker institutional capacity, chronic threat, and limited legitimate opportunity.
4. Repeated violence and low clearance → distrust, self-protection, and retaliation.
5. Incarceration and exclusion → family, labor-market, and network disruption that can reproduce risk.

CHAPTER 4

Poverty, Place, and the Concentration of Violence

Individual hardship matters, but the organization of neighborhoods changes what hardship means.

Poverty is often invoked as though it were a single variable. Household income, material hardship, wealth, neighborhood poverty, unemployment, housing instability, inequality, and opportunity are distinct. A low-income family in a safe neighborhood with functioning institutions may face serious deprivation without the same exposure to violence as an equally low-income family in a place where shootings, vacancy, underground markets, and institutional distrust are concentrated.

Concentrated disadvantage combines multiple structural conditions. Its exact construction varies across studies, commonly including poverty, unemployment, public assistance, female-headed households, youth concentration, or related census indicators. Because these components are correlated, an index can capture a neighborhood ecology better than one variable. It can also obscure which component matters, so results should be tested against alternative specifications.

Collective efficacy describes social cohesion joined with a shared willingness to intervene for the common good. In the foundational Chicago multilevel study, collective efficacy was associated with lower violence after accounting for individual and neighborhood characteristics. The concept does not mean that residents in high-violence communities lack values. It describes the capacity to translate shared expectations into action under conditions of trust, stability, and organizational support.

Violence itself weakens the conditions needed to control violence. Residents may avoid public space, businesses may leave, witnesses may fear retaliation, families may move when they can, and institutions may struggle to retain staff. The resulting reduction in informal supervision and trust can make public areas more available for conflict. This feedback process helps explain persistence without assuming a fixed community culture.

Place-based concentration is also micro-geographic. Research on crime at places repeatedly shows that a small fraction of street segments and addresses produce a large share of incidents. That concentration cautions against describing an entire neighborhood, much less a race, as

dangerous. It supports interventions aimed at specific environments and networks while protecting the majority of residents from broad suspicion.

Firearm availability changes the lethality of disputes. The same argument, impulsive act, or retaliatory encounter is more likely to produce death when a gun is accessible. Firearms can also become part of the perceived need for self-protection in high-threat settings. This creates a collective-action problem: an individual may believe carrying improves personal safety while widespread carrying increases the probability that ordinary conflicts become lethal.

Economic strain can affect violence through multiple pathways: illegal market participation, reduced future expectations, family stress, residential instability, and weakened attachment to conventional institutions. Yet many poor communities have low violence, and many people who offend are not the poorest. Poverty is therefore neither necessary nor sufficient. It changes risks in interaction with place, networks, weapons, institutions, and individual characteristics.

Individual poverty and concentrated disadvantage are not interchangeable

Level	Examples	Interpretive value
Individual	Income, education, employment, prior victimization	Describes personal resources and exposures
Household	Wealth, housing stability, caregiver strain	Captures shared material and relational context
Neighborhood	Concentrated poverty, vacancy, violence, institutions	Captures contextual opportunity, threat, and collective capacity
City/region	Segregation, labor market, firearm environment, governance	Captures political economy and institutional structure

CHAPTER 5

Survival Adaptation and Chronic Threat

A behavior may be understandable as short-term protection while remaining destructive, risky, and morally wrong.

Humans learn from repeated environments. In a predictable environment, waiting, trusting formal authority, and assuming benign intent may be rewarded. In an environment where threats are recurring and protection is unreliable, vigilance and rapid response can appear rational. The survival-adaptation concept integrates this basic learning process with criminological work on street codes, legal cynicism, victimization, and weapon carrying.

The framework does not describe a unique racial psychology. Similar adaptations can emerge wherever people face recurrent threat, weak protection, instability, and constrained opportunity. The racial pattern arises because exposure to those conditions is unequally distributed. A mechanism that is activated by environment should vary when environments change, within racial groups, and across places with different institutional conditions.

Weapon carrying offers a clear example. Some young people report carrying because they fear victimization. The act can feel defensive even when it increases the likelihood of escalation, accidental injury, arrest, or retaliatory attack. CDC analysis of the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that students who had witnessed community violence were much more likely to report gun carrying, with adjusted prevalence ratios above two across Black, White, and Hispanic students. The cross-sectional design cannot prove direction in every case, but the association is consistent with a threat-adaptation pathway.

Reputation can function as a form of informal protection. If a person believes authorities will not prevent victimization, appearing unwilling to retaliate may be perceived as inviting future harm. A norm of toughness can therefore be reproduced even among people who privately dislike it. The individual incentive and collective outcome diverge: each person seeks deterrence, but the community experiences more rapid escalation.

Chronic threat also narrows attention. Under acute stress, people prioritize immediate cues and consequences. Sleep disruption, grief, traumatic symptoms, substance use, and repeated loss can reduce cognitive and emotional resources. This does not eliminate control, and it does not mean

that trauma causes violence. It identifies a pathway by which the probability of impulsive or defensive aggression may rise under specific circumstances.

Legal cynicism is not simply hostility toward law. It can reflect a belief that legal institutions are unable or unwilling to provide protection. Low homicide clearance, negative police contact, slow emergency response, or witnessed unfairness can strengthen reliance on self-help. Improving legitimacy therefore matters for violence prevention not because respectful treatment is symbolic, but because credible institutions alter the perceived need for private enforcement.

The adaptation frame must be bounded. It should not romanticize violent conduct, assume that every offender was acting defensively, or convert a broad social pattern into an individual diagnosis. Predation, coercion, instrumental violence, interpersonal cruelty, and opportunism also exist. A good model explains some pathways strongly, others weakly, and states where it does not apply.

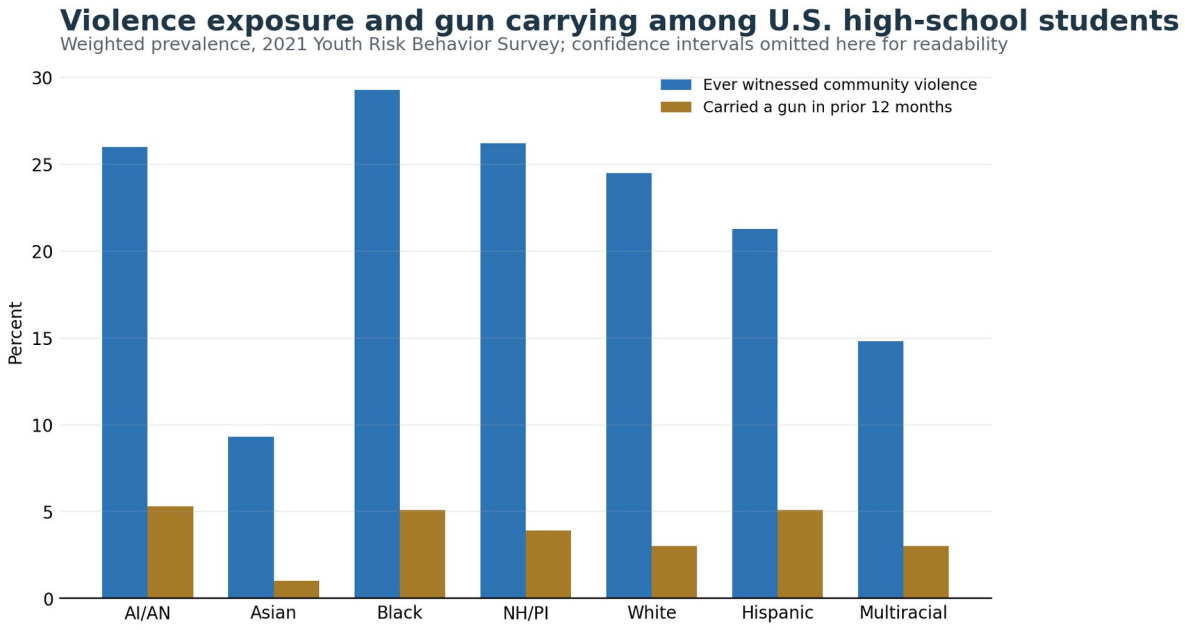

Figure 4. Exposure and weapon carrying are distributed unequally, with important uncertainty.

Source: CDC, 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, N=17,232. Some subgroup confidence intervals are wide; categories are mutually exclusive as defined by CDC.

Evidence does not equal inevitability

For Black students in the CDC analysis, 70.8 percent of those reporting gun carrying had witnessed community violence compared with 26.9 percent among those not reporting gun carrying; the adjusted prevalence ratio was 2.6. Comparable adjusted associations appeared among White and Hispanic students. This pattern supports exposure as a cross-group mechanism. It does not show

that witnessing violence inevitably produces carrying, that carrying always follows exposure, or that race is the causal ingredient.

CHAPTER 6

The Breaking-Point Model

The final trigger is often the last event in a longer accumulation, not the full cause of the act.

Everyday language often calls the precipitating event a trigger: a disrespectful remark, betrayal, financial loss, confrontation, or perceived threat. The word can make the event sound like a switch that mechanically activates violence. A more useful model separates chronic load, acute precipitant, interpretation, opportunity, and action. The same incident can produce different responses because people arrive with different histories, resources, expectations, and restraints.

Structural exposure sits at the beginning of the model, not because distant policy directly causes a particular act, but because it shapes the distribution of recurring conditions. Chronic load accumulates through victimization, grief, insecurity, family stress, discrimination, unstable housing, exposure to conflict, and weak trust in protection. Each element can be survivable alone while the combination reduces reserve capacity.

Adaptation mediates between load and event. A person may learn to scan for threat, interpret ambiguity defensively, maintain a weapon, suppress vulnerability, or expect retaliation. These patterns can become automatic without becoming uncontrollable. An acute precipitant then activates the learned script. Whether the person acts depends on peers, intoxication, weapon availability, escape routes, anticipated consequences, moral commitments, and the presence of credible third parties.

The model preserves agency by placing decision and opportunity immediately before action. Explanation is not a claim that the person had no alternative. It asks why one alternative became salient and another receded. Accountability addresses the decision and harm; prevention changes the conditions, opportunities, and scripts that make harmful decisions more likely.

Feedback determines whether the chain repeats. A shooting can produce grief, fear, retaliation, police activity, incarceration, family disruption, and further distrust. Alternatively, rapid medical care, credible mediation, witness protection, fair investigation, family support, and community response can interrupt escalation. The post-incident environment is therefore part of prevention.

The breaking-point metaphor should not be generalized to every homicide. Planned instrumental violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence, organized market disputes, and psychosis-related incidents may follow different processes. The report’s model is most useful for conflicts shaped by

cumulative strain, perceived threat, status, retaliation, and situational escalation. Separate offense types require separate evidence.

A testable version of the model predicts that cumulative exposure should increase sensitivity to acute stressors; protective relationships and collective efficacy should moderate that association; weapon access should increase lethality; and credible intervention after a conflict should reduce retaliation. Research designs can examine each link instead of treating "environment" as a vague background explanation.

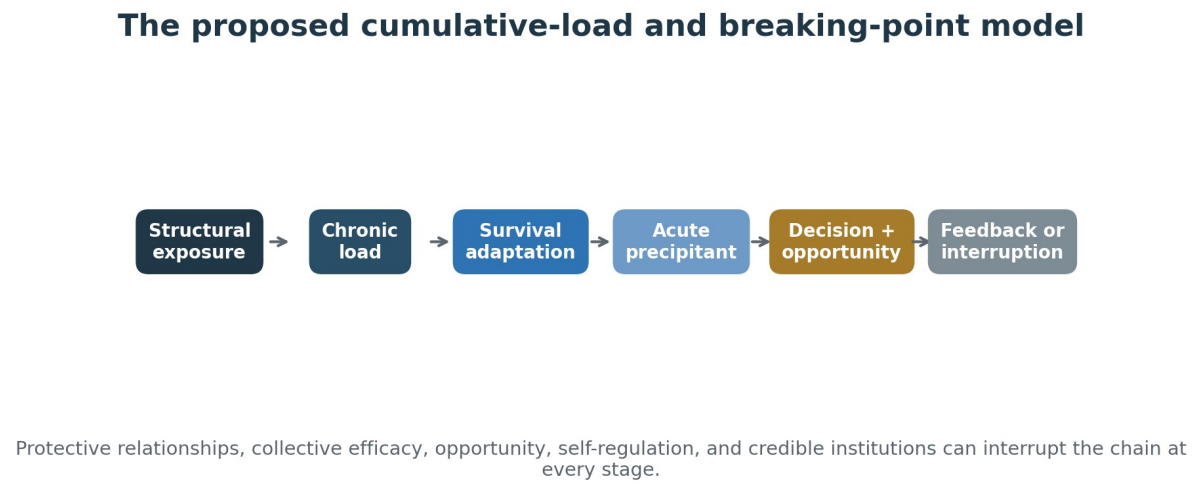
The proposed cumulative-load and breaking-point model
Structural exposure
Chronic load
Survival adaptation
Acute precipitant
Decision + opportunity
Feedback or interruption
Protective relationships, collective efficacy, opportunity, self-regulation, and credible institutions can interrupt the chain at every stage.

Figure 5. Cumulative-load and breaking-point framework.

Source: Author synthesis of strain, social-disorganization, violence-exposure, legal-cynicism, and situational perspectives. The model is probabilistic.

The difference between cause, precipitant, and excuse

Concept	Question	Example
Background cause	What created recurring exposure or vulnerability?	Concentrated violence, instability, weak protection
Precipitant	What immediately activated the conflict?	A threat, insult, loss, or confrontation
Mechanism	How did exposure alter interpretation or action?	Vigilance, retaliation script, weapon carrying
Opportunity	What made severe harm possible at that moment?	Gun access, peers, absence of guardianship
Excuse	Does the explanation remove responsibility?	No; causal understanding and accountability are distinct

CHAPTER 7

Development, Family, Peers, Schools, and Work

Risk accumulates through systems, while protective relationships can redirect a life at multiple points.

Violent offending is strongly age-graded. Adolescence and early adulthood combine heightened sensitivity to peers and status, developing self-regulation, greater independence, and increased exposure to risky settings. These developmental features are general, but their consequences differ across environments. A teenager navigating safe transportation, supervised activities, and trusted institutions faces a different decision landscape from one repeatedly exposed to armed conflict.

Family matters through processes rather than stereotypes. Stable attachment, monitoring, communication, material security, and conflict management can protect against violence. Household structure may correlate with those processes but does not define them. Single parents can provide extraordinary stability; two-parent households can contain violence or neglect; extended kin can supply crucial support. Analyses that use family form as a racial explanation often confuse structure with resources, stress, neighborhood context, and incarceration exposure.

Peers transmit information, norms, opportunities, and protection. Violence is often concentrated within small social networks rather than evenly across demographic groups. Network exposure can raise risk through direct recruitment, shared conflicts, retaliation, and the need to respond to events affecting friends or relatives. It can also protect when peers support school, work, caregiving, and nonviolent identity.

Schools are both educational institutions and daily social environments. Safety, belonging, fair discipline, adult mentorship, extracurricular activity, and credible pathways to graduation affect attachment to conventional futures. Exclusionary discipline can remove students from protective settings and increase unsupervised time, while unequal school resources can narrow opportunity. Yet schools cannot compensate alone for housing instability, family stress, or community violence.

Employment changes routine activities, income, identity, and future expectations. The quality and stability of work matter, not merely whether a person had any job. Criminal records, transportation barriers, discrimination, limited local openings, and unstable scheduling can weaken the protective value of employment. Programs should therefore connect people to

credible, sustained opportunity rather than treating a short placement as a complete intervention.

Trauma-informed practice is useful when it recognizes symptoms and avoids unnecessary re-traumatization. It becomes unhelpful when every act is labeled a trauma response or accountability disappears. Effective practice joins safety, treatment, skill-building, and clear expectations. The central question is not "What is wrong with this person?" or only "What happened to this person?" but also "What supports, choices, and obligations can change what happens next?"

Protective factors are cumulative too. One reliable adult, one successful school transition, one safe job, one mediated conflict, or one treatment episode can alter a trajectory. Policy should create repeated opportunities for interruption because no single program will reach every person at the correct moment.

Risk and protection across development

Domain	Risks	Protective processes
Family	Conflict, instability, caregiver strain, loss	Attachment, monitoring, material support, nonviolent problem-solving
Peers	Armed networks, retaliation, coercion	Prosocial belonging, credible mentors, conflict mediation
School	Unsafe climate, exclusion, weak attachment	Belonging, fair discipline, achievement, adult connection
Work	Joblessness, instability, informal-market exposure	Stable income, identity, routine, advancement
Community	Violence exposure, vacancy, low trust	Collective efficacy, safe spaces, organizations, legitimacy

CHAPTER 8

Policing, Legitimacy, and Measurement Distortion

Communities can be over-policed for minor conduct and under-protected from lethal violence at the same time.

Policing affects crime statistics before an arrest appears in a table. Patrol patterns influence which behavior is observed. Resident trust influences whether victims and witnesses report. Investigative resources influence clearance. Classification practices influence offense categories. Prosecutorial decisions influence which arrests become cases. Racial disparities can therefore enter at multiple points, and the size of distortion depends on the offense and decision stage.

Discretion is generally greater for low-visibility and low-level offenses than for homicide. Drug possession, disorder, traffic enforcement, and street stops can be strongly influenced by deployment and policy. Homicide is less discretionary as an event, but offender identification and clearance still depend on witness cooperation, forensic capacity, investigative quality, and institutional trust. It is inaccurate both to treat homicide data as perfectly neutral and to dismiss the disparity as merely a patrol artifact.

Legitimacy has instrumental value. People are more likely to cooperate when authorities are perceived as fair, lawful, respectful, and effective. Cooperation improves information and can increase the certainty that serious violence will be solved. Broad aggressive tactics may generate arrests while weakening the relationships needed to prevent retaliation and clear shootings.

The National Academies describes racial inequality as cumulative across police contact, detention, sentencing, incarceration, and supervision. A prior arrest can affect employment, housing, family stability, and future system contact even without a conviction. These consequences feed back into the same neighborhood conditions associated with violence. Criminal-justice contact is thus both an outcome of risk and a potential producer of future disadvantage.

Under-protection deserves equal emphasis. Families in high-violence communities often want effective police response, reliable investigations, and protection from retaliation. Reform that simply withdraws services can leave residents exposed. The goal is a narrower and more

competent safety function: fewer unnecessary contacts, greater focus on severe harm, lawful targeted intervention, transparent accountability, and stronger investigative performance.

Data systems should measure more than arrests. Clearance rates, victim satisfaction, procedural fairness, use of force, calls for service, nonfatal shootings, hospital injuries, repeat victimization, witness safety, and community perceptions all provide information about safety and legitimacy. What an institution measures shapes what it tries to improve.

Racial measurement itself requires care. Administrative race may be officer-observed; victim surveys use self-identification for victims and perception for offenders; Hispanic origin can overlap with race in some tables and be mutually exclusive in others. Comparisons must state the classification rather than assuming categories are interchangeable.

Where measurement distortion is most plausible

Stage	Potential selection	Implication
Victimization	Recall, reporting, survey coverage	NCVS estimates have uncertainty and exclude homicide
Police awareness	Reporting, detection, deployment	Known crime differs from all crime
Arrest	Clearance, probable cause, discretion	Arrest composition is not offending composition
Charging	Prosecutorial screening and evidence	Filed cases differ from arrests
Sentencing	Charge, plea, record, policy	Prison composition reflects cumulative decisions

CHAPTER 9

What Happens When Relevant Factors Are Controlled

The question is not whether one regression makes race disappear, but how the relationship changes across better comparisons.

Statistical control is often described as though researchers can hold “everything else” equal. They cannot. A model adjusts only for measured variables in the specified form. Income measured at one point does not equal lifetime wealth. A census tract does not perfectly represent a person’s activity space. Police records do not capture every violent event. Trauma, discrimination, network position, and institutional trust are difficult to measure without error.

Controls can also be conceptually downstream. If segregation contributes to neighborhood poverty, and neighborhood poverty contributes to violence, controlling for poverty estimates a direct racial association after removing part of the pathway of interest. That may be useful, but it does not show poverty was irrelevant. Researchers must distinguish confounders, mediators, moderators, and proxies rather than placing every variable into one model and reading the race coefficient as truth.

A sequential model is more informative. Begin with the unadjusted disparity. Add age and sex because serious violence is highly concentrated demographically. Add individual and household resources. Add neighborhood disadvantage and violence exposure. Add family, school, peers, employment, and prior justice contact where temporally appropriate. Then examine how the coefficient, uncertainty, and sample change. The pattern of attenuation reveals which measured domains account for portions of the association.

The strongest classic evidence comes from multilevel research showing that neighborhood conditions and collective efficacy are associated with violence beyond individual characteristics. Sampson and colleagues’ analysis of Chicago neighborhoods found lower violence in places with greater collective efficacy, while concentrated disadvantage was related to lower collective efficacy. Later studies have extended, challenged, and contextualized those findings. Effect sizes vary across cities, periods, definitions, and national welfare contexts.

Research on race, street-code beliefs, and violent delinquency suggests that structural disadvantage can shape cultural adaptations, which in turn predict violence. This is not evidence that a racial group has a fixed violent culture. It supports a mediated model in which local beliefs respond to danger and institutional conditions. Because culture and environment influence each other, cross-sectional models must be interpreted cautiously.

Matched-neighborhood comparisons are appealing but difficult. Neighborhoods that look equal on poverty may differ in wealth, segregation history, violence exposure, housing markets, police relationships, organizational density, and proximity to opportunity. A residual racial difference after a limited match should not be labeled genetic or cultural by default. It identifies unexplained variation and the need for better measurement.

The honest synthesis is that socioeconomic and neighborhood factors explain substantial portions of many racial disparities in violence and justice contact, but estimates differ and not every gap vanishes. Age, sex, and place are consistently important. Exposure, networks, family processes, opportunity, firearms, and institutions add explanatory power. Remaining differences may reflect unmeasured environment, measurement selection, different pathways, or genuine behavioral variation not captured by the model. Evidence should narrow claims, not manufacture certainty.

A disciplined sequence for adjusted comparisons

Model	Variables added	Interpretation
A	Race/ethnicity and outcome only	Descriptive disparity
B	Age, sex, period, geography	Basic compositional adjustment
C	Education, income, wealth, employment, household	Individual and family resources
D	Neighborhood disadvantage, violence, segregation, institutions	Contextual exposure
E	Peers, victimization, school, justice contact, weapons	Proximate mechanisms
F	Sensitivity tests and alternate measures	Robustness and unresolved uncertainty

What would change the conclusion?

The environmental thesis should be narrowed if well-designed longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies repeatedly show little attenuation after high-quality exposure measures, if proposed mechanisms fail across groups and settings, or if changing environmental conditions fails to change violence. Conversely, evidence that improvements in place, institutions, opportunity, or exposure reduce violence strengthens a causal account. Falsifiability separates a research program from an ideology.

CHAPTER 10

Comparisons Across Race and Place

Variation within racial groups is evidence against treating race as a sufficient cause.

Black Americans do not live in one social environment. They differ by region, class, nativity, neighborhood, age, family history, religion, occupation, and exposure. White Americans living in persistent rural or urban disadvantage also experience elevated risks related to addiction, violence, mortality, and justice contact, though the specific forms and institutional responses can differ. Hispanic and immigrant communities show wide variation by national origin, generation, segregation, and local opportunity.

If race were sufficient to explain violence, within-group geographic variation should be modest. It is not. Homicide and shooting rates differ dramatically across cities and neighborhoods with substantial Black populations. Many majority-Black communities have low serious violence. A small number of places account for a large share of incidents. The relevant comparison is therefore not an average Black person against an average White person, but people exposed to specified combinations of risk and protection.

Same-race victim-offender concentration is also often misunderstood. BJS estimates for 2017–2021 show that violent incidents more often involved victims and perceived offenders from the same broad group, especially among White and Black victims. This partly reflects proximity and opportunity: people are generally victimized by others in their social and geographic environments. It does not imply collective guilt or hostility unique to one group.

Immigrant patterns challenge simple deprivation accounts. Some immigrant communities maintain relatively low violence despite economic hardship, possibly through family networks, social organization, selective migration, or community institutions. Over generations, outcomes can converge toward local conditions. These cases show that disadvantage interacts with organization, norms, and opportunity rather than operating as a mechanical input.

Rural disadvantage also complicates urban stereotypes. Persistent poverty, limited services, firearm access, substance use, family stress, and sparse institutions can produce severe harm outside large cities. The mix of homicide, suicide, domestic violence, and public violence differs, reinforcing the need to disaggregate outcomes rather than use one national crime label.

Cross-national comparison requires caution because firearm prevalence, welfare systems, policing, segregation, and data definitions differ. Still, the fact that racial categories have different associations across national contexts argues against fixed biological interpretations. Social classifications operate through specific histories and institutions.

The comparison principle is constructive: locate environments where people facing disadvantage achieve safety, then identify the protective structures. Low violence is not simply the absence of risk; it may reflect dense organizations, trusted adults, stable housing, effective conflict mediation, legitimate institutions, and norms that support nonviolent identity.

Comparison questions that produce better evidence

- Do similarly disadvantaged places have similar violence after accounting for age, sex, weapons, and local institutions?
- Which majority-Black communities have low violence, and what protective conditions distinguish them?
- How do rates change when neighborhood conditions improve or deteriorate over time?
- Do the same exposure mechanisms predict violence within multiple racial and ethnic groups?
- Which residual differences remain robust to alternative definitions, periods, and datasets?

CHAPTER 11

Responsibility, Resilience, and Desistance

Explanation becomes stronger—not weaker—when it accounts for the majority who do not offend.

Most people exposed to serious adversity do not commit homicide, robbery, or aggravated assault. This fact is sometimes offered as a rebuttal to environmental explanation: if poverty caused crime, every poor person would offend. The rebuttal assumes causes must be deterministic. Public health and social science usually study probabilistic causes. Smoking does not cause cancer in every smoker; protective factors and biological variation do not make smoking irrelevant.

Non-offending can result from moral commitments, temperament, caregiving responsibilities, fear of consequences, future goals, supportive relationships, faith, structured activity, treatment, or simple absence of a high-risk opportunity. These factors interact. A person may experience anger and threat while lacking a weapon, being removed by a friend, anticipating harm to family, or trusting a mediator. Prevention can strengthen those points of interruption.

Responsibility belongs to the person who acts, while responsibility for prevention is distributed more widely. An individual can be morally and legally accountable even when institutions helped create the conditions of risk. Governments can be responsible for discriminatory policy; agencies for unfair or ineffective practice; communities for local norms and intervention; and individuals for choices. These levels do not cancel one another.

Desistance research shows that offending is not a permanent identity. Aging, employment, relationships, parenthood, cognitive transformation, treatment, and changes in peer networks can reduce offending. Policy that treats every high-risk person as permanently dangerous may undermine the very bonds that support change. At the same time, optimism must not override immediate victim safety.

Victims require more than symbolic inclusion. Families need rapid medical care, financial assistance, trauma services, truthful information, competent investigation, witness protection, and long-term support. Many victims and people who have offended come from the same networks and neighborhoods, and some individuals occupy both roles across time. Services designed around a clean victim-offender binary may miss that reality.

Resilience should not become an excuse for neglect. Praising communities for surviving disinvestment can shift responsibility away from institutions. Protective capacity deserves investment precisely because residents have demonstrated agency under strain. The policy goal is to reduce the amount of extraordinary resilience required for ordinary safety.

The deepest reason to reject racial fatalism is empirical and ethical. Group averages do not predict an individual with sufficient accuracy or fairness. Broad suspicion damages opportunity, trust, and legitimacy. A prevention framework should target behavior, networks, situations, and places with demonstrated risk while treating race as context rather than probable cause.

Protective interruption points

Stage	Possible interruption
Before exposure	Stable housing, safe public space, economic security, effective schools
During chronic load	Trauma care, family support, mentoring, income and housing stabilization
Before conflict	Mediation, credible messengers, safe transportation, weapon separation
During acute crisis	Bystander action, cooling-off space, rapid trusted response
After victimization	Hospital intervention, witness protection, retaliation prevention
After offending	Fair accountability, treatment, education, employment, reentry support

CHAPTER 12

Counterarguments and Competing Explanations

A credible thesis must survive the strongest alternatives, not merely the easiest objections.

"The disparity proves a racial or genetic cause."

A descriptive association does not identify a biological mechanism. Racial categories are broad, socially defined, internally diverse, and correlated with environmental exposures created by history and institutions. Genetic claims must specify a plausible trait, valid measurement, pathway to a defined offense, within-group variation, population structure, and environmental confounding. Large changes in crime over time and place, and strong within-group variation, are difficult to reconcile with a fixed racial explanation. No evidence reviewed here justifies treating race as a biological cause of violent crime.

"Culture is the real cause."

Norms can influence violence, but "culture" is often used as an unexplained stopping point. Street-code research suggests that retaliatory or toughness norms may develop under danger and weak institutional protection. Culture can mediate structural conditions and then reproduce them. The empirical questions are which norms, held by whom, under what conditions, how strongly they predict behavior, and whether they change when environments and institutions change. A localized adaptation should not be attributed to an entire racial group.

"Father absence explains everything."

Family stability and caregiving matter, but household form is intertwined with employment, incarceration, mortality, relationship quality, neighborhood conditions, and policy. A father's presence is not automatically protective if the relationship is violent or unstable, and absence does not imply lack of male mentorship or extended-family support. Research should measure parenting processes and resources rather than use family structure as a racial proxy.

"It is only poverty."

Simple income measures do not capture wealth, neighborhood danger, institutional capacity, firearms, peer networks, or historical segregation. Poverty is neither necessary nor sufficient for violence. The stronger position is that concentrated disadvantage interacts with exposure,

opportunity, and organization. Some poor communities are safe because protective institutions and norms remain strong; some higher-income individuals commit violence through different pathways.

"It is only biased policing."

Bias and differential enforcement matter greatly for stops, low-level offenses, arrest records, and cumulative justice contact. They cannot fully explain homicide victimization, death records, or every robbery pattern. The appropriate approach evaluates selection at each stage and triangulates datasets. Rejecting a policing-only account does not require pretending police data are neutral.

"Environmental explanation excuses offenders."

Causal explanation is required for prevention and does not determine moral or legal judgment. Medicine studies causes without absolving choices; traffic safety studies road design without denying driver responsibility. Violence policy can impose proportionate accountability while changing conditions that elevate risk. Refusing explanation in the name of responsibility leaves future victims unprotected.

"Most disadvantaged people are not violent, so environment cannot matter."

Probabilistic causes change likelihood rather than guaranteeing an outcome. The majority nonviolent outcome is precisely why protective factors, network position, opportunity, and individual differences belong in the model. The environmental thesis predicts variation, not uniformity.

The balanced conclusion

No single explanation accounts for all violent acts. Serious violence emerges from interacting individual, relational, situational, community, and structural factors. The evidence supports environmental and institutional mechanisms as major contributors to racial disparity while preserving roles for agency, norms, family processes, peer networks, substances, weapons, and enforcement. A multilevel account is less rhetorically simple and more empirically useful.

CHAPTER 13

A Policy Portfolio for Safety and Equity

Immediate protection and long-term prevention must operate together, be evaluated honestly, and avoid broad racial targeting.

A serious policy agenda begins with the distribution of harm. Because shootings and serious violence are concentrated among small numbers of people, networks, and places, interventions should be focused rather than indiscriminate. Focus should be based on recent behavior, victimization, conflicts, and demonstrated network risk—not race, neighborhood reputation, or broad demographic profiling.

Focused deterrence and group violence intervention combine a clear message about consequences with services, community moral voice, and coordinated attention to people closest to severe violence. Systematic reviews generally find moderate reductions, although stronger designs often produce smaller effects and implementation quality varies. Programs can fail when enforcement dominates services, lists are inaccurate, community legitimacy is weak, or promised help does not materialize.

Hospital-based violence intervention reaches people at a teachable and dangerous moment after injury. Effective programs use credible staff, safety planning, conflict mediation, trauma care, and connections to housing, employment, and treatment. Evaluation should track reinjury, retaliation, service uptake, and participant safety—not merely contacts made.

Street outreach and credible-messenger programs can interrupt conflicts and connect people to services, but evidence is mixed and implementation is demanding. Programs need clear protocols, supervision, staff safety, reliable funding, and integration without turning community workers into covert police agents. Trust is an operating asset.

Environmental prevention changes the settings in which conflicts occur. Randomized and quasi-experimental Philadelphia research links vacant-lot remediation and greening with reductions in some crime outcomes and improved perceptions of safety. Place-based design is not a substitute for social investment, but it is a concrete demonstration that changing physical conditions can change behavior and fear without arrest.

Youth prevention should strengthen families, school belonging, mentoring, employment pathways, conflict-resolution skills, and safe after-school environments. Programs should

prioritize sustained relationships rather than brief information campaigns. The CDC's prevention resources emphasize multi-level strategies because shared risk and protective factors affect multiple forms of violence.

Police reform and violence reduction should be integrated. Agencies can narrow low-value enforcement, improve procedural justice, prioritize homicide and shooting clearance, protect witnesses, use lawful problem-solving at hot spots, and publish performance measures beyond arrest totals. The certainty and legitimacy of response generally matter more than severity alone.

Economic and housing policy are violence policy when they reduce instability, expand legitimate opportunity, and strengthen neighborhood institutions. Yet large structural investments require long timelines and should not be sold as immediate substitutes for protecting people currently at risk. A portfolio sequences short-, medium-, and long-term actions.

Evaluation must include unintended consequences. A program that reduces recorded incidents by displacing violence, suppressing reporting, or increasing harmful contact has not necessarily improved safety. Measures should include victimization, injury, mortality, resident experience, legitimacy, equity, and cost. Community members should help define success while independent evaluation protects credibility.

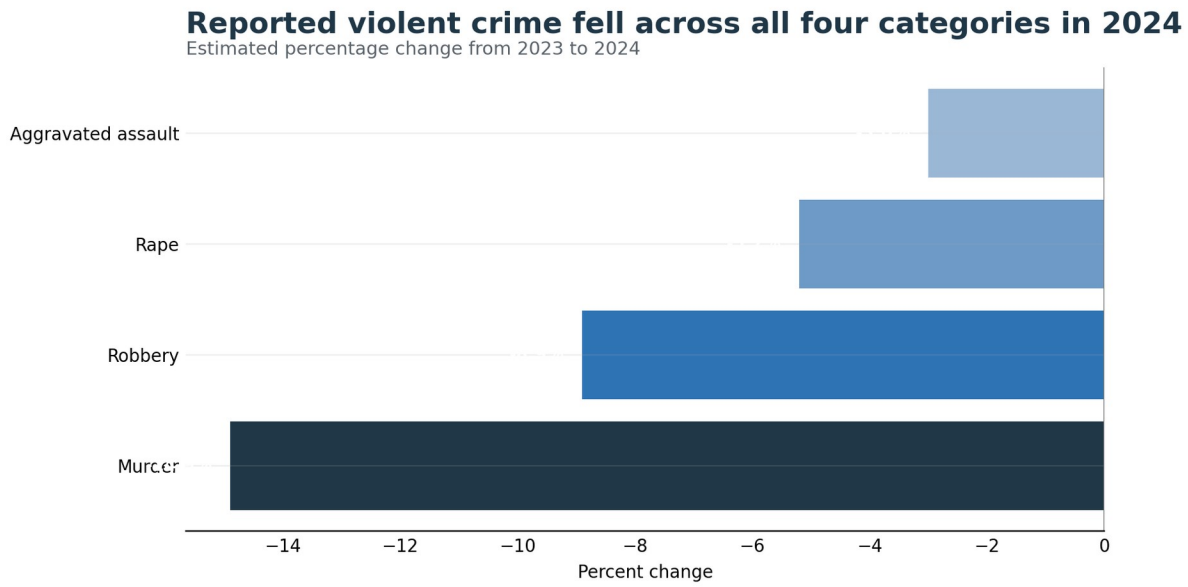

Figure 6. National violence trends can change quickly, reinforcing that group disparities are not fixed.

Source: FBI, 2024 Reported Crimes in the Nation. Values are estimated national percentage changes from 2023.

Recommended portfolio

Horizon	Priority actions
Immediate: days to months	Conflict mediation; victim protection; focused investigation; safe housing; hospital response; weapon separation
Near-term: months to two years	Focused deterrence with services; outreach; youth jobs; school supports; vacant-property remediation; trauma care
Long-term: years	Housing stability; wealth and opportunity; institutional capacity; education; segregation reduction; reentry and record barriers
System infrastructure	Integrated injury/crime data; transparent evaluation; community governance; stable funding; independent oversight

Policy guardrails

- Target conduct and acute risk, not racial identity.
- Pair enforcement promises with credible services and follow-through.
- Protect confidentiality and do not convert health or outreach data into general intelligence files.
- Measure victimization, injury, legitimacy, and resident experience alongside arrests.
- Publish implementation failures and null results, not only success stories.
- Invest in communities as partners with expertise, not as objects of intervention.

CHAPTER 14

Homicide Victimization, Firearms, and Circumstance

Lethal violence is the clearest evidence that the disparity is not merely an arrest artifact—and that the people stereotyped by the numbers are also carrying extraordinary victimization.

Homicide requires separate treatment from broad violent-crime categories. It is rare, severe, less dependent on victim willingness to report, and more consistently represented in mortality systems than robbery or assault. At the same time, homicide offender information is often missing, and case clearance varies by city, victim, circumstance, and institutional capacity. The event count is comparatively strong; the explanation and offender composition remain conditioned on investigation.

FBI supplementary homicide data for 2019 reported that 54.7 percent of murder victims with known race were Black, 42.3 percent were White, and 3.1 percent were from other racial groups. Among offenders whose race was known, 55.9 percent were Black, 41.1 percent White, and 3.0 percent other races. Race was unknown for 4,752 offenders—a limitation that belongs beside the percentages (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020, Expanded Homicide Data Tables 1–3). Adult murder-arrest composition was similar but not identical. These converging sources make it implausible to dismiss the entire disparity as low-level enforcement bias, while the unknown information prevents treating known-offender tables as complete.

Victimization is morally and analytically central. A population with a high homicide victimization rate is experiencing shortened lives, traumatic bereavement, disrupted parenting, medical costs, fear, and loss of public space. Children and adolescents may repeatedly encounter funerals, injured relatives, changed school routines, and armed self-protection. The resulting exposure can influence later behavior even among people who never offend. Homicide is thus an outcome and a neighborhood input.

Sex concentration is striking. In the FBI's 2019 supplementary data, 78.3 percent of murder victims were male; in the arrest table, males represented 88 percent of murder arrestees. Age and sex are not side variables added to make a model more sophisticated. They define the population most exposed to lethal conflict. Comparing murder arrests with the total national population

without age and sex structure creates an exaggerated impression that race alone is doing the explanatory work.

Firearms alter lethality and the temporal structure of conflict. An argument that might otherwise produce injury can produce death in seconds. The presence of guns may deter some confrontations, but it also reduces opportunities for cooling off, escape, mediation, and medical survival. In high-threat environments, carrying can feel individually protective while widespread carrying creates a more lethal collective equilibrium.

CDC mortality data show how unequal this burden became during the pandemic period. The crude firearm-homicide rate among non-Hispanic Black people rose from 20.5 per 100,000 in 2019 to 28.3 in 2020 and 30.4 in 2021, before declining to 27.5 in 2022. The 2022 rate remained far above 2019. Rates also increased among American Indian or Alaska Native and Hispanic populations, while White and Asian or Pacific Islander rates were lower but not unchanged (Kegler, Simon, & Sumner, 2023).

A racial comparison of firearm-homicide rates is still not a causal decomposition. Crude rates reflect age and sex distributions as well as place, exposure, and circumstance. The purpose of the comparison is to show burden and urgency. Explanation requires age-specific rates, neighborhood and city conditions, firearm markets, prior victimization, social networks, and institutional response.

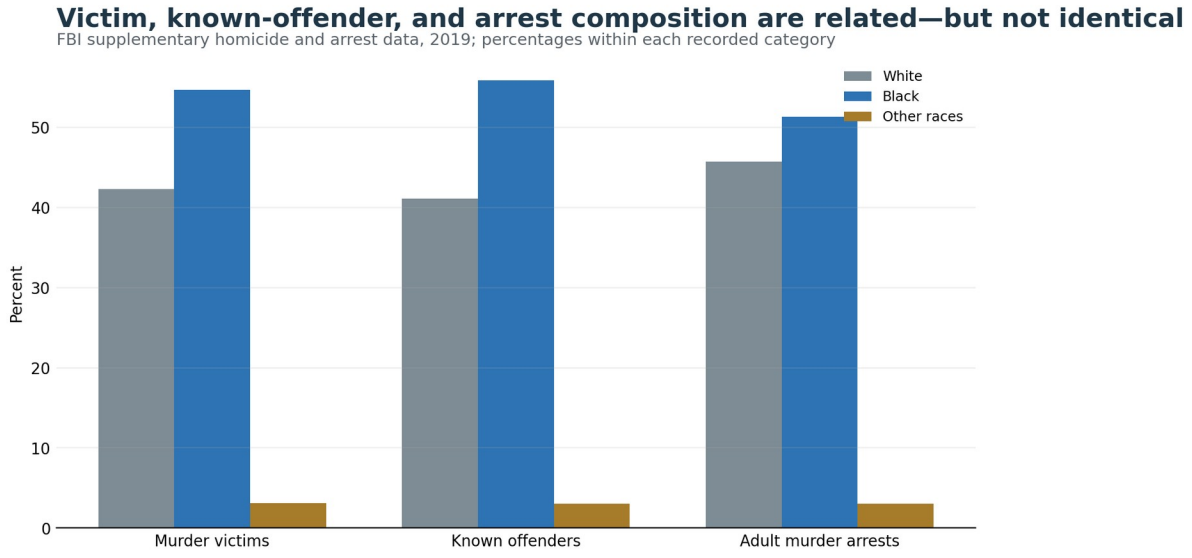

Figure 7. Three homicide-related measurements converge on a large disparity while measuring different populations.

Source: FBI, Expanded Homicide and Crime in the United States, 2019. Known-offender percentages exclude cases with completely unknown offender demographics; arrest percentages refer to recorded adult arrests.

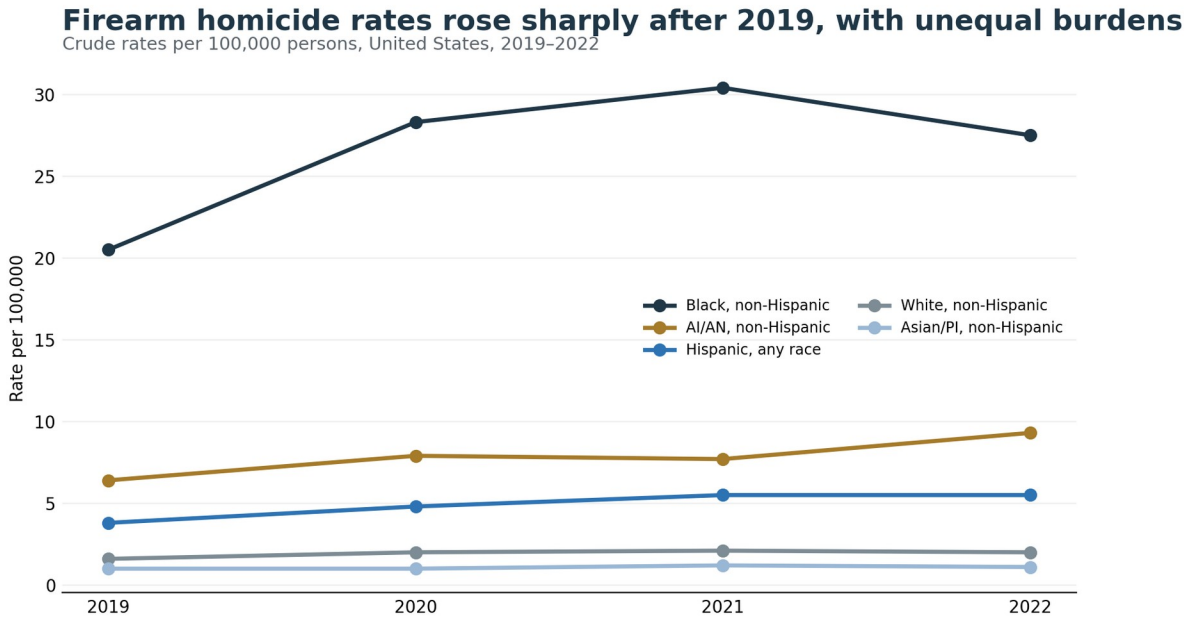

Figure 8. Firearm-homicide rates changed rapidly and unequally from 2019 through 2022.

Source: CDC WONDER and U.S. Census Bureau, as reported by Kegler, Simon, and Sumner (2023). Rates are crude per 100,000; AI/AN misclassification may produce undercounting.

Circumstance matters

Homicide is not one behavior. Interpersonal disputes, intimate-partner violence, robbery, gang or group conflict, child abuse, felony-related events, and killings with unknown circumstances require different mechanisms. A theory centered on street threat and retaliation should not be casually used to explain coercive control in an intimate relationship or violence against children. The broad disparity is a mixture of pathways.

NVDRS data add circumstance information by combining death certificates, medical-examiner or coroner records, and law-enforcement reports. For 2020, CDC reported that homicide rates were highest among Black male victims and that intimate-partner violence precipitated a large proportion of female homicides. Interpersonal conflict and acute life stressors appeared across violent deaths. These findings support disaggregation by sex, relationship, and precipitant rather than a single race coefficient.

Clearance is part of the causal environment. When families see killings remain unsolved, trust can deteriorate and private retaliation may become more credible. Low clearance can also be a consequence of witness fear and prior illegitimate treatment. Research should treat clearance, witness protection, and communication with victims' families as public-safety mechanisms, not merely administrative outputs.

A victim-centered approach changes policy priorities. It demands trauma and financial assistance, rapid investigation, witness safety, school support for bereaved children, and interruption of retaliation. These services should not depend on a victim's criminal history, cooperation status, or perceived innocence. Selective compassion undermines legitimacy and ignores the overlap between victimization and offending across the life course.

What homicide evidence establishes—and what it does not

Conclusion	Support level	Reason
The disparity is not only a low-level arrest artifact	Strong	Victim, mortality, known-offender, and arrest records show compatible unequal burdens
Race itself causes homicide	Unsupported	Race supplies no mechanism and is confounded with age, sex, place, exposure, and institutions
Firearms increase lethality	Strong	Weapon availability compresses time and raises the probability that conflict becomes fatal
All homicide follows one breaking-point pathway	Unsupported	Circumstances and offense pathways differ substantially
Victimization must be central to explanation	Strong	High-burden communities experience repeated exposure, loss, and feedback

CHAPTER 15

How Strong Is the Environmental Evidence?

The evidence is strongest when multiple designs connect unequal conditions to violence across levels, groups, places, and interventions.

A persuasive environmental thesis cannot rest on the observation that poverty and violence occur together. That association may reflect selection, reverse causation, omitted variables, or measurement. Stronger inference comes from convergence: multilevel studies separating people from places, longitudinal studies establishing order, historical analyses connecting policy to durable spatial conditions, quasi-experiments and randomized interventions changing environments, and mechanism studies showing how exposure affects behavior.

The foundational collective-efficacy study used surveys of Chicago residents, systematic social observation, and police-recorded homicide and violence. Neighborhood collective efficacy predicted lower violence after individual characteristics and structural conditions were considered. The study's contribution was not that "community spirit" solves crime. It showed that neighborhood social organization has measurable explanatory value beyond the traits of residents (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

The social-anatomy research on racial and ethnic disparities moved further by examining neighborhood disadvantage, immigrant concentration, social organization, and individual characteristics together. Its central lesson is overlap: Black and White respondents were distributed across profoundly different neighborhood environments. Conventional regression can appear to compare like with like while relying on extrapolation where comparable cases are rare. Segregation is therefore a methodological problem as well as a substantive cause of unequal exposure (Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005).

Longitudinal work on neighborhood violence shows collateral consequences for adolescents. Exposure can affect school engagement, health, substance use, and perceptions of safety. Because prior behavior may influence where people spend time and whom they encounter, longitudinal adjustment is essential but imperfect. The consistency of exposure associations across outcomes makes violence itself a plausible mechanism through which disadvantage reproduces disadvantage.

Street-code studies provide a cultural mechanism without making culture racial essence. Concentrated disadvantage and legal cynicism can strengthen beliefs that respect must be defended and formal authorities cannot provide protection. Those beliefs predict violence and can mediate structural associations. The limitation is reciprocal causation: violent involvement may also strengthen the beliefs used to justify it.

Historical redlining studies add temporal depth. Across cities, adverse historical lending grades are associated with contemporary firearm injury or violent death after selected adjustments. These studies cannot reconstruct every intervening decision, and neighborhood populations changed. Their value is demonstrating that present-day spatial risk retains a measurable relationship with past institutional classification and disinvestment.

Environmental remediation supplies more direct causal evidence. Randomized vacant-lot trials changed physical conditions and observed later differences in perceived safety and some crime outcomes. The intervention is modest relative to structural inequality, which makes the result important: even a bounded change to visible disorder, use, and guardianship can alter experience. Effects are not universal, and displacement and neighborhood context must be measured (Branas et al., 2018; Macdonald et al., 2022).

Economic studies test whether wages, employment shocks, housing instability, and benefits affect violence. Findings vary by policy, population, and outcome. Income can reduce strain and illegal-market participation, while employment changes routine activities and future expectations. But one economic variable cannot represent wealth, segregation, social organization, or violence exposure. Mixed effects refine rather than defeat the environmental thesis.

Evidence by causal distance

Evidence family	Example question	Main contribution	Main vulnerability
Descriptive	Where are homicide and victimization concentrated?	Defines burden and target population	No causal mechanism
Multilevel	Do neighborhood conditions predict violence beyond individuals?	Separates contextual and person-level variation	Selection and unmeasured context
Longitudinal	Does earlier exposure predict later behavior?	Temporal ordering and trajectories	Attrition and time-varying confounding
Historical-spatial	Do earlier policies predict present risk?	Institutional persistence across time	Intervening change and boundary mismatch
Quasi-experimental	Does a policy or place change alter violence?	Stronger counterfactual comparison	Assumption and local context
Randomized intervention	Does assigned environmental treatment change outcomes?	High internal validity	Treatment scope and generalizability

Where adjusted racial gaps shrink

Across many studies, age and sex adjustment materially changes racial comparisons because serious violence is concentrated among younger males. Adding household resources often reduces associations further, but neighborhood conditions add information not contained in income. Violence exposure, prior victimization, peers, school attachment, and justice contact are frequently closer to behavior and may mediate part of the remaining gap.

The phrase "explains the gap" must be used narrowly. If a race coefficient falls after neighborhood disadvantage is added, the model shows statistical attenuation under those measures and assumptions. It does not prove a fixed percentage of causation, and it does not mean neighborhood disadvantage is independent of racial history. If disadvantage is a pathway created by segregation, adjustment estimates a remaining direct association after removing part of the process the theory seeks to explain.

Residual associations deserve attention without becoming a blank check for essentialism. They can arise from poor measures of wealth, exposure, discrimination, network position, weapons, policing, or family processes; from nonlinear relationships and interactions; from selection and missingness; or from pathways not in the environmental model. A residual is a research finding, not a named cause.

Evidence scorecard for the central claims

Claim	Assessment	Basis
Race is not a sufficient causal mechanism	High confidence	Strong within-group, place, and temporal variation; no specified racial mechanism
Concentrated disadvantage contributes to violence	High confidence	Repeated multilevel associations, historical evidence, and intervention studies
Collective efficacy and institutional capacity matter	Moderate–high	Consistent U.S. evidence with contextual variation and measurement challenges
Threat exposure encourages protective and retaliatory adaptations	Moderate–high	Cross-sectional, longitudinal, qualitative, and mechanism-consistent findings
Available controls explain the entire racial disparity	Low confidence	Measures are incomplete; results and outcomes vary
A single intervention can reverse structural disparity	Low confidence	Effects are bounded and implementation-dependent
A coordinated portfolio can reduce serious violence	Moderate confidence	Multiple evidence streams support complementary strategies; package evidence remains limited

CHAPTER 16

Case Studies in Prevention and Implementation

Programs do not succeed because their labels are evidence-based; they succeed when mechanisms, delivery, legitimacy, and local conditions align.

Case Study 1: Vacant-lot remediation in Philadelphia

Philadelphia researchers used randomized and quasi-experimental designs to test whether cleaning and greening abandoned lots changed safety. Treatments generally removed trash, graded land, planted grass and trees, installed low fences, and maintained the space. Studies reported improvements in residents' perceptions and reductions in some violent or firearm outcomes, with variation by neighborhood poverty and treatment type.

The case is powerful because it manipulates an environmental condition rather than inferring from neighborhood correlation. Several mechanisms may operate simultaneously: increased visibility and guardianship, reduced space for concealment or illegal activity, greater resident use, lower stress, and a visible signal that institutions respond. The modest cost and place specificity make scaling plausible, but long-term maintenance and displacement must be addressed.

The lesson is not that grass prevents homicide. It is that physical conditions participate in behavioral opportunity and resident experience. Environmental prevention should be paired with housing protection and community ownership so reinvestment does not simply remove the people who endured the original neglect.

Case Study 2: Focused deterrence and group violence intervention

Focused deterrence identifies groups or individuals at unusually high risk of serious violence, communicates a clear consequence for continued harm, mobilizes community moral voice, and offers assistance. An updated systematic review identified twenty-four quasi-experimental evaluations and found a statistically significant, moderate average crime-reduction effect. Effects were smaller in more rigorous designs and varied by program type.

Implementation determines whether the model remains focused. Poorly maintained lists, vague gang labels, enforcement-heavy delivery, unavailable services, and weak community participation can transform a focused strategy into broad surveillance. Strong programs use recent conduct and

network risk, provide a correction process, keep consequences proportionate, and deliver services quickly.

Focused deterrence fits the report's multilevel framework because immediate accountability and opportunity are delivered together. It does not replace structural investment. It creates a near-term interruption for people closest to lethal violence while longer-term work changes the conditions replenishing that risk group.

Case Study 3: Hospital-based violence intervention

A violent injury creates both danger and opportunity. Patients may face retaliation, re-injury, trauma symptoms, housing instability, and legal problems. Hospital-based programs employ credible intervention specialists to begin safety planning, mediate conflicts, connect services, and continue contact after discharge. The hospital supplies access to a population at acute risk that conventional office-based services may never reach.

Evidence across programs is promising but heterogeneous. Randomized trials are difficult because programs are complex and participants face rapidly changing threats. Outcomes should include re-injury, retaliation, service engagement, housing stability, trauma, and participant-defined safety. A program that counts bedside contacts without tracking what happened afterward may appear active without being effective.

Confidentiality is essential. Participants will disengage if health and outreach information becomes routine police intelligence. Clear boundaries can still permit emergency safety coordination with consent and legal safeguards. Staff need manageable caseloads, clinical support, and reliable emergency resources.

Case Study 4: Street outreach and credible messengers

Outreach programs employ people with local credibility to detect conflicts, mediate disputes, change norms, and connect high-risk participants to services. Their comparative advantage is relational access. Their vulnerability is implementation: workers may be asked to cover too much territory, lack stable pay, face danger, or be treated as informants by authorities and as agents of the state by participants.

Evaluation results are mixed across cities. Some programs show reductions in shootings; others show no clear effect or changes that cannot be separated from broader trends. Mixed evidence should lead to specification, not abandonment. Studies must document caseloads, mediation quality, service delivery, staff turnover, geographic coverage, and the conflicts actually reached.

The lesson is that credibility is a mechanism, not a credential. Lived experience can open a door, but professional training, supervision, boundaries, and organizational capacity determine what happens after access is gained.

Case Study 5: Homicide clearance and victim-family trust

Investigation is usually discussed as response rather than prevention. Yet credible certainty that severe violence will be solved can reduce the perceived need for private retaliation and strengthen cooperation. Families' experience of communication, dignity, and protection affects whether institutions are viewed as partners. A case that is technically open but functionally silent can deepen distrust.

Improving clearance requires competent staffing, forensic support, witness protection, language access, manageable caseloads, and accountability for investigative quality. It should not be pursued through indiscriminate stops or coercive practices that damage the information environment. The goal is focused effectiveness against severe harm.

Research evidence on clearance as a neighborhood-level intervention remains less developed than evidence on hot spots or focused deterrence. That gap is itself important. A public-safety system should measure whether families receive answers and whether improved clearance reduces retaliation and future incidents.

Case Study 6: Youth employment and opportunity

Summer youth employment and targeted job programs can change income, routine activities, adult supervision, peer networks, and future expectations. Evaluations in several cities have reported reductions in violent-crime arrests or improvements in related outcomes, though effects differ and may not persist without continued opportunity. A short job is an intervention window, not a labor-market solution.

Programs work best when jobs are meaningful, paid reliably, accessible by transportation, supported by mentors, and linked to later education or employment. Merely placing a young person in a low-quality temporary role can reinforce distrust. Employers need support to manage conflict and accommodate participants facing unstable housing, caregiving, or justice obligations.

Opportunity interventions demonstrate that prevention can change daily structure without criminalizing participants. They should be concentrated where violence exposure is high while remaining open enough to avoid stigmatizing every participant as a potential offender.

A complete safety portfolio works on multiple time horizons
Immediate protection hours–months
Mediation • victim safety • focused investigation • hospital response
Focused prevention months–2 years
Outreach • services • youth employment • place remediation
Institutional capacity 1–5 years
Clearance • legitimacy • schools • housing stability • reentry
Structural prevention multi-year
Opportunity • wealth • segregation • durable public investment

Figure 9. Safety requires interventions operating on multiple time horizons.

Source: Author synthesis based on CDC prevention resources, National Academies recommendations, and intervention research.

Implementation failure modes

Failure mode	Why it matters	Corrective practice
A proven label without the tested components	The program name is not the mechanism	Document fidelity, staffing, dosage, and local adaptations
Services promised but unavailable	Destroys trust and leaves deterrence unbalanced	Fund rapid, flexible, participant-relevant assistance
Inaccurate risk lists	Exposes low-risk people and misses current conflicts	Use recent behavior, review criteria, and correction pathways
Short grants and staff turnover	Relationships and learning disappear	Provide multi-year funding tied to transparent performance
Arrest-only evaluation	Can reward harmful contact or suppressed reporting	Measure injury, victimization, legitimacy, and resident experience
No community authority	Intervention lacks local knowledge and accountability	Share governance, data interpretation, and decision power

CHAPTER 17

Boundaries, Limitations, and Unanswered Questions

The paper is strongest when it states what the evidence cannot yet prove and where its central model should not be applied.

This report is a research synthesis and conceptual framework, not an original causal analysis of restricted microdata. Its charts reproduce or calculate transparent values from official tables, but it does not estimate new multilevel models. Claims about what controls explain are therefore based on published studies whose variables, samples, periods, and designs differ. A definitive quantitative decomposition remains a future project.

The report uses “survival adaptation” as an integrative phrase rather than a validated diagnostic construct. It connects established evidence on threat, victimization, weapon carrying, legal cynicism, strain, and retaliatory norms. The phrase will require operationalization and testing before it should be treated as a distinct theory. Its value is organizing mechanisms; its risk is becoming so broad that every behavior appears adaptive after the fact.

The breaking-point model applies most plausibly to cumulative strain, perceived threat, status conflict, and retaliation. It is less suited to planned predation, intimate-partner coercive control, sexual violence, child abuse, ideologically motivated violence, or violence driven by severe mental disturbance. Those pathways may include stress and environment, but they require distinct theories and evidence.

Race and ethnicity are handled as broad administrative categories because national sources use them. Those categories conceal ancestry, nativity, generation, skin color, class, region, and identity. Hispanic origin is treated as mutually exclusive in some sources and separate from race in others. Indigenous misclassification can undercount mortality. Asian and Pacific Islander populations are frequently combined despite substantial heterogeneity. Every comparison is therefore coarser than the lived populations it names.

Neighborhood measurement remains imperfect. Census tracts do not necessarily match resident-defined neighborhoods or daily activity spaces. People select and are constrained into places through processes that models observe incompletely. A neighborhood coefficient can represent

institutions, peers, environmental conditions, policy, or unmeasured individual composition. Multilevel analysis improves inference without eliminating ambiguity.

Official crime data contain missingness and selection. Homicide counts are stronger than known-offender characteristics. Arrest data reflect enforcement and investigation. Victim surveys exclude homicide and depend on memory and perception. Health data contain little offender information. Convergence increases confidence, but no source is a neutral mirror of all behavior.

The report does not assign a single percentage of racial disparity to structural inequality, current neighborhood conditions, policing, culture, family processes, or individual decisions. Available studies are not commensurable enough for a defensible national partition. The correct conclusion is that multiple environmental and institutional domains account for substantial portions of the disparity and provide supported mechanisms, while residual and offense-specific differences remain.

Publication timing matters. Crime trends, FBI reporting participation, CDC mortality, poverty, policing, and intervention evidence change. A public edition should state a data cutoff and update fast-moving national tables before release. Stable theoretical claims should be distinguished from the newest annual estimate.

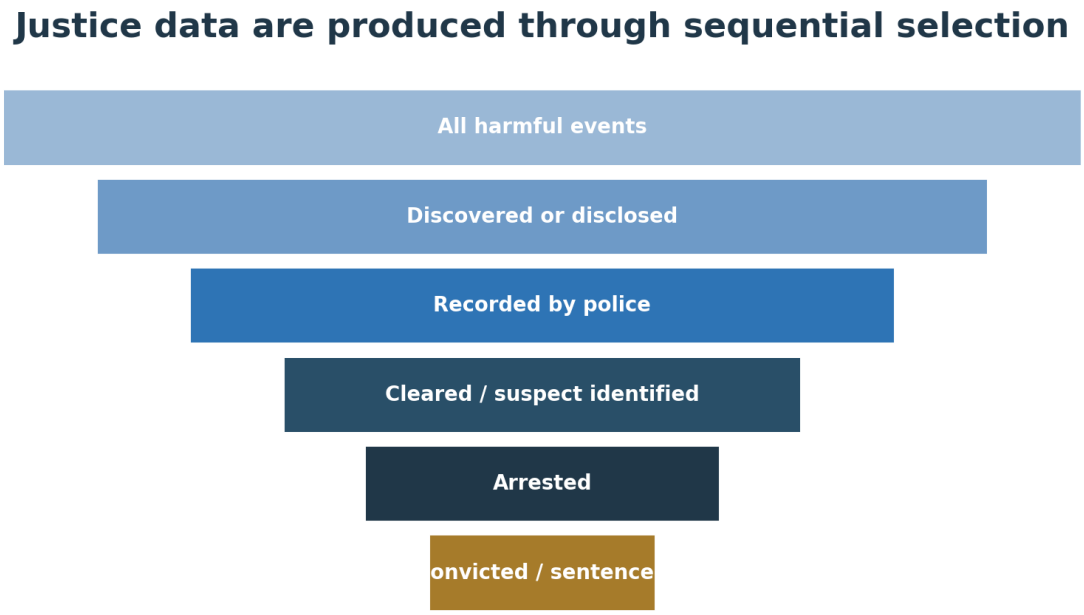
Justice data are produced through sequential selection
All harmful events
Discovered or disclosed
Recorded by police
Cleared / suspect identified
Arrested
onvicted / sentence
The width is conceptual, not an estimate. Selection differs by offense, place, reporting, investigation, and policy.

Figure 10. Every later-stage justice statistic is conditioned on earlier selection.

Source: Conceptual figure. Segment widths are illustrative, not empirical estimates; the amount and direction of selection differ across offenses and systems.

Questions the evidence has not settled

- How much of the national homicide disparity would remain under high-quality, age-specific, multilevel exposure measures with strong common support?
- Which protective processes distinguish disadvantaged communities with persistently low serious violence?
- How do online conflicts, mobility, and firearm networks alter traditional neighborhood effects?
- Does improved lawful homicide clearance reduce retaliation and later violence independently of broader policing?
- Which combinations of focused intervention and structural investment produce durable population-level change?
- How should survival adaptation be measured without pathologizing ordinary vigilance or retrospectively rationalizing harm?

Claims deliberately not made

- That all observed racial disparities are products of measurement bias.
- That socioeconomic adjustment eliminates every difference.
- That violent offenders are merely victims without agency.
- That one broad “Black culture” or “White culture” explains violence.
- That environment is a complete explanation for every form of violence.
- That policy can remove risk without tradeoffs, implementation failures, or unintended consequences.

CHAPTER 18

Conclusion: What the Numbers Mean

The purpose of context is not to make the numbers disappear; it is to make them intelligible and actionable.

The original question was why a large racial disparity appears in some measures of murder, manslaughter, and robbery. The answer cannot be reduced to one cause. Some of the disparity reflects real differences in severe violence and victimization. Some measurements are shaped by reporting, detection, clearance, enforcement, and classification. Much of the social pattern is bound to unequal exposure to concentrated disadvantage, recurrent violence, weak institutional protection, limited opportunity, and cumulative justice-system contact.

Race identifies where American history and institutions have concentrated many of those exposures, but it does not explain the behavior on its own. Moving from race to mechanism changes the meaning of the statistic. The category is no longer treated as a character judgment. It becomes a signal to examine age, sex, place, networks, victimization, weapons, family and school processes, opportunity, legitimacy, and the distribution of protection.

The survival-adaptation framework adds a psychologically understandable link. Recurrent danger can encourage vigilance, distrust, weapon carrying, reputation defense, and retaliation. An acute incident can become a breaking point when it interacts with cumulative load, available scripts, peers, intoxication, weapons, and reduced alternatives. The model is probabilistic and bounded. It does not explain all violence, and it does not erase the decision to harm.

The majority of exposed people remain nonviolent. Their lives show the power of moral agency, relationships, organizations, opportunity, and resilience. They also show why broad racial suspicion is both inaccurate and counterproductive. Effective prevention strengthens the conditions that support nonviolence while focusing accountability on demonstrated harmful behavior.

A policy capable of reducing racial disparity must reduce violence itself, improve protection for victims, narrow unnecessary justice contact, and change the environments that repeatedly generate risk. That requires more than one program and more than one election cycle. It requires focused immediate action, credible institutions, stable community partnership, economic and physical investment, and transparent evaluation.

The public choice is not between acknowledging the numbers and acknowledging inequality. Both are necessary. Serious violence must be confronted directly because it destroys lives and limits freedom. Structural and institutional inequality must be confronted because it shapes where that destruction is concentrated and how society responds. The most honest position protects people from violence without converting a disparity into a verdict on a race.

Appendix A. Data-Interpretation Checklist

Use this checklist before quoting a racial crime statistic in research, journalism, policy, or public discussion.

Check	Question
Identity	What exact racial and Hispanic-origin definitions were used? Were they self-identified, perceived, or administratively assigned?
Unit	Is the unit an incident, offense, victim, suspected offender, arrest, person, conviction, admission, or incarcerated population?
Denominator	Is the comparison a count, population rate, age-specific rate, or share of a selected outcome?
Time	Is the period one year, a moving average, or a multi-year aggregate?
Coverage	Which agencies, households, jurisdictions, or populations are included or excluded?
Unknowns	How much race, offender, relationship, or case information is missing?
Selection	What reporting, detection, enforcement, clearance, or survey processes produced the observation?
Uncertainty	Are standard errors, confidence intervals, small samples, or unstable estimates reported?
Comparison	Were age, sex, socioeconomic conditions, place, exposure, and other relevant factors considered?
Claim	Is the statement descriptive, associational, or causal—and does the evidence support that level?

Appendix B. Evidence Matrix

Source/design	Best use	Strength	Major limit
FBI UCR/CDE	Police-known offenses and arrests	National scope and offense detail	Agency coverage, clearance, enforcement, definitions
Supplementary homicide/NIBRS	Incident, victim, offender, circumstance	Homicide specificity	Unknown offenders and incomplete submissions
NCVS	Nonfatal victimization, reported or not	Captures hidden crime	No homicide; perception and sampling limits
CDC mortality/injury	Deaths and health outcomes	Strong lethal-outcome measurement	Limited offender and justice detail
Census/ACS	Population and neighborhood conditions	Denominators and context	Ecological inference limits
Longitudinal cohorts	Development and temporal ordering	Mechanism and trajectories	Attrition and generalizability
Multilevel studies	People nested in places	Individual/context separation	Residual confounding and boundary choice
Quasi-experiments	Policy or environmental change	Stronger causal inference	Assumption-sensitive and context-specific
Randomized trials	Intervention effects	Strong internal validity	Implementation and transfer limits

Appendix C. Glossary

Acute precipitant. The immediate event that activates a conflict; not necessarily the full cause.

Arrest share. The percentage of recorded arrests in a category; not a population offending rate.

Collective efficacy. Social cohesion plus shared willingness to intervene for the common good.

Concentrated disadvantage. The spatial clustering of poverty and related institutional and social constraints.

Confounder. A variable associated with both exposure and outcome that can distort an estimated relationship.

Ecological fallacy. Inferring individual characteristics from group-level associations.

Legal cynicism. A belief that legal institutions are illegitimate, unavailable, or ineffective.

Mediator. A variable through which an earlier exposure affects an outcome.

NIBRS. The FBI's incident-based reporting system with detailed offense and incident information.

NCVS. The national household survey measuring many nonfatal victimizations, including those not reported to police.

Protective factor. A condition associated with lower risk or greater resilience.

Rate. A count relative to a defined population and period.

Residual disparity. A remaining statistical association after specified adjustments; not automatically proof of an unmeasured intrinsic cause.

Survival adaptation. A behavioral or psychological adjustment to recurring threat or scarcity that may be protective short-term and harmful long-term.

Triangulation. Comparing evidence from multiple sources with different strengths and limitations.

Appendix D. Figure Data and Notes

Figure 1

FBI 2019 adult arrest composition: all adult arrests—White 69.9%, Black 26.1%, other races 4.0%; adult murder arrests—White 45.7%, Black 51.3%, other races 3.0%. Hispanic origin is reported separately in the source and is not a mutually exclusive race category in this chart.

Figure 2

BJS NCVS 2017–2021 rates per 1,000 persons age 12 or older. White: total violent crime 19.8, robbery 1.6, aggravated assault 3.2, violence excluding simple assault 6.4. Black: 19.4, 2.8, 3.8, 8.0. Hispanic: 18.4, 2.5, 3.8, 7.8. Asian/NHOPI: 9.8, 0.9, 1.1, 3.1. The survey excludes homicide.

Figure 3

BJS NCVS total violent-victimization rate per 1,000, two-year moving averages: 2008 26.3; 2009 23.8; 2010 20.8; 2011 20.9; 2012 24.4; 2013 24.6; 2014 21.6; 2015 19.3; 2016 19.1; 2017 20.1; 2018 21.9; 2019 22.1; 2020 18.7; 2021 16.4.

Figure 4

CDC YRBS 2021 weighted percentages. Ever witnessed community violence / gun carrying in prior 12 months: AI/AN 26.0/5.3; Asian 9.3/1.0; Black 29.3/5.1; Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander 26.2/3.9; White 24.5/3.0; Hispanic 21.3/5.1; multiracial 14.8/3.0. Several subgroup estimates have wide confidence intervals; readers should consult the source table.

Figure 6

FBI estimated 2023-to-2024 national change: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter −14.9%; robbery −8.9%; rape −5.2%; aggravated assault −3.0%. These are national estimates of reported crime and do not describe identical changes in every city or group.

Figures 7–10

Figure 7 compares the racial composition of 2019 homicide victims with known offenders and adult murder arrests. Figure 8 reports CDC crude firearm-homicide rates per 100,000 for 2019–2022: Asian/Pacific Islander 1.0, 1.0, 1.2, 1.1; American Indian/Alaska Native 6.4, 7.9, 7.7, 9.3; Black 20.5, 28.3, 30.4, 27.5; White 1.6, 2.0, 2.1, 2.0; Hispanic 3.8, 4.8, 5.5, 5.5; total population 4.4, 5.8, 6.3, 5.9. Figure 9 is a conceptual policy-horizon map, not an effect-size chart. Figure 10 is

a conceptual selection funnel showing that offenses, known incidents, suspects, arrests, convictions, and incarceration are successively selected populations.

Supplemental Figure 1

NCVS 2017–2021 estimated same-broad-group offender shares are calculated from victim-perceived offender counts divided by each victim-group total: White 55.2%; Black 60.9%; Hispanic 35.1%; Asian/NHOPI 13.6%; other 12.6%. These are incident-level estimates, not individual propensities. Unknown race, multiple offenders, sampling error, and broad classifications limit interpretation.

Appendix E. Evidence Profiles and Interpretive Notes

The profiles below explain how major sources contribute to the argument and where they should not be stretched beyond their design. They are included to make the report's reasoning auditable for readers who do not routinely work with crime and neighborhood data.

E1. FBI arrest tables

The FBI's 2019 arrest tables are the source of the adult murder-arrest composition used in this report. Their strength is straightforward administrative description across participating law-enforcement agencies. Their weakness is equally important: the table describes arrests, not unique offending acts or population prevalence. An arrest requires police awareness, investigation, suspect identification, probable cause, and agency reporting. The table also treats race and Hispanic origin through separate fields, which complicates ordinary comparisons between mutually exclusive public categories. The correct use is to state the composition of recorded arrests and then examine whether other sources show compatible patterns. The incorrect use is to divide the arrest share by a total-population share and call the result an inherent racial propensity.

E2. Supplementary homicide and incident-based records

Homicide incident records can describe victims, known or suspected offenders, weapons, relationships, and circumstances. They are particularly valuable because homicide is less hidden than many crimes. Yet offender information is frequently unknown, and the probability of identification can differ with witness cooperation, investigative capacity, relationship, and place. A table of known offenders is conditioned on cases with known information. Analysts should report the unknown share and avoid implying that identified cases are a perfectly representative sample of all homicides. Incident records are strongest when triangulated with mortality data and local information about clearance.

E3. National Crime Victimization Survey

The NCVS estimates nonfatal victimization through a nationally representative household survey. It includes incidents not reported to police and therefore addresses a central limitation of administrative records. The survey is particularly useful for comparing offense-specific victimization rates and reporting behavior. It excludes homicide, institutional populations, and children younger than twelve. Offender characteristics are based on victims' perceptions and may be unknown or difficult to classify, especially in brief, stressful, dark, or multiple-offender events.

Multi-year aggregation improves stability for subgroup estimates but averages across changing conditions. NCVS findings should be presented with standard errors and confidence intervals rather than as exact population counts.

E4. CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey

The 2021 YRBS provides nationally representative evidence about high-school students' reported exposure to community violence and gun carrying. Its most important contribution to this report is cross-group mechanism evidence: within Black, White, and Hispanic groups, students who carried guns were substantially more likely to report having witnessed community violence. Adjusted prevalence ratios remained elevated after specified demographic controls. Because the data are cross-sectional and the exposure is lifetime while gun carrying is past-year, temporal ordering is imperfect. The evidence supports association and plausibility, not a claim that witnessing caused every instance of carrying. Wide confidence intervals for some smaller groups also require caution (Harper et al., 2023).

E5. Collective efficacy research

Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls used multilevel data from Chicago to examine whether social cohesion and willingness to intervene were associated with violence beyond individual and structural characteristics. The study is influential because it connected neighborhood organization to measured violence and separated person-level from neighborhood-level variation. It does not prove that one intervention to "increase collective efficacy" will automatically reduce violence, and Chicago in the 1990s is not every city. Subsequent research generally supports the importance of neighborhood context while showing that effect sizes, measures, and pathways differ across settings. The concept is best used as a mechanism requiring local measurement rather than a universal score.

E6. Social anatomy of racial disparities

Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush examined racial and ethnic disparities in violence using longitudinal and multilevel data. Their work is central because it moved analysis beneath racial labels to neighborhood context, exposure, social organization, and individual characteristics. It also emphasized that Black and White Americans often inhabit nonoverlapping neighborhood environments, making ordinary statistical comparison difficult. The study does not imply that every residual difference is explained or that a single model settles causation. It supports the report's broader claim that racial inequality in place and social exposure is necessary to understanding violence disparities.

E7. Street-code and cultural adaptation studies

Research on “code of the street” beliefs tests whether expectations about respect, toughness, retaliation, and self-protection predict violent behavior. Strong versions of this literature treat culture as a mediator formed under concentrated disadvantage and legal cynicism rather than as a racial possession. Empirical work finds meaningful associations, but beliefs and behavior can influence one another, and self-report measures may share method bias. The contribution is to show how structural conditions can become behavioral scripts. The limitation is that a culturally framed measure can be overgeneralized from high-risk samples to an entire neighborhood or population.

E8. Historical redlining and firearm violence

Recent studies compare historical Home Owners’ Loan Corporation grades with modern firearm injuries or deaths. They report that areas receiving the most adverse historical grades often experience higher contemporary violence, even after selected adjustments. These studies show durable spatial association and plausible pathways through investment, segregation, wealth, and neighborhood conditions. They cannot establish that the 1930s map alone caused a specific modern shooting. Neighborhood boundaries and populations changed, and modern policy also matters. The evidence is most persuasive as part of a cumulative historical account rather than a single-variable explanation.

E9. Vacant-lot remediation trials

Philadelphia studies of vacant-lot greening are important because they move from correlation toward intervention. Randomized and quasi-experimental designs found improvements in perceived safety and reductions in some crime outcomes, with effects varying by neighborhood and treatment. The intervention changes visibility, use, guardianship, stress, and signals of care at once, so the exact mechanism is not fully isolated. Greening is not a substitute for employment, education, trauma care, or violence intervention. It demonstrates that physical environments are causally relevant enough to merit inclusion in a comprehensive portfolio.

E10. Focused deterrence systematic reviews

Systematic reviews of focused-deterrence strategies generally find a statistically significant, moderate reduction in crime, particularly when interventions concentrate on groups, networks, or individuals at high risk. More rigorous designs often produce smaller estimates than weaker designs, and program labels conceal differences in services, enforcement, community

participation, and implementation (Braga, Weisburd, & Turchan, 2019). The evidence supports careful use, not automatic replication. Programs should maintain accurate risk criteria, proportionality, procedural fairness, and genuinely available assistance; otherwise focused deterrence can become ordinary aggressive enforcement under a new name.

E11. National Academies synthesis

The 2023 National Academies report synthesizes research across crime, victimization, police contact, courts, incarceration, and community supervision. It concludes that racial inequality is cumulative and that historical and contemporary socioeconomic disadvantage can increase both crime and criminal-justice contact. Its strength is breadth and expert review. Like any synthesis, it depends on an uneven underlying literature and cannot produce one universal effect estimate. This report uses it to frame systems and feedback, while returning to original or official sources for specific numerical claims.

E12. Census poverty and neighborhood data

Census and American Community Survey products supply population denominators and measures of income, poverty, employment, housing, and neighborhood composition. They make contextual analysis possible, but census categories are not direct measures of informal social control, trauma, illegal markets, police legitimacy, or daily activity spaces. A tract is an administrative approximation of a neighborhood. Researchers should test multiple geographic units, account for residential mobility, and avoid assigning tract averages to every resident.

Appendix F. Recommended Empirical Analysis Plan

A future quantitative companion to this report should be preregistered where practical and should publish reproducible code and nonrestricted derived data. The purpose would not be to produce a single "percentage explained," but to compare how disparities behave across measures, levels, periods, and model assumptions.

F1. Define outcomes separately

Homicide offending, homicide victimization, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, firearm injury, arrest, conviction, and incarceration should not be pooled into one violent-crime outcome. Each has different reporting, discretion, victims, motives, and policy relevance. Primary analyses should use rates with age-appropriate population denominators. Supplemental analyses may examine composition among events, but should not substitute shares for rates. Repeated events involving the same people or places should be modeled when the data permit.

F2. Use mutually intelligible demographic categories

Race and Hispanic origin should be coded into mutually exclusive categories for most comparisons while retaining the source's original fields. Analysts should document whether race was self-identified, victim-perceived, officer-assigned, or administratively recorded. Age should be modeled flexibly rather than as one linear term; sex should be included because violence is highly sex-graded. Nativity and generation should be incorporated when available, especially for Hispanic and immigrant comparisons.

F3. Build a multilevel exposure model

Individual and household variables should include education, income, wealth where available, employment quality, housing instability, victimization, substance use, family processes, school attachment, and prior justice contact. Neighborhood measures should include concentrated disadvantage, segregation, violent exposure, firearm environment, vacancy, organizational density, collective efficacy, transit and opportunity access, and police legitimacy. City-level measures should include labor-market conditions, housing policy, firearm laws, investigative resources, and regional context.

F4. Respect temporal ordering

Variables measured after the outcome must not be casually interpreted as causes. Prior victimization, arrest, incarceration, family disruption, and neighborhood change can influence one

another over time. Longitudinal models should establish a clear observation window and distinguish baseline conditions, time-varying exposures, mediators, and outcomes. Fixed-effects models can address some stable unobserved differences but may amplify measurement error and cannot solve time-varying confounding by themselves.

F5. Present sequential models

Results should begin with descriptive rates, then add demographic composition, individual resources, household processes, neighborhood context, proximal mechanisms, and system contact in a transparent sequence. The report should show coefficient change, uncertainty, sample change, and model fit at each stage. Standardized results can aid comparison, but readers should also receive predicted rates in natural units. Interactions should be theory-driven rather than searched indiscriminately.

F6. Test mediation without overclaiming

If neighborhood violence, legal cynicism, or street-code beliefs are proposed as mechanisms, mediation analysis should state assumptions and use longitudinal measurement where possible. A reduced race coefficient after adding a mediator is suggestive, not proof. Exposure-mediator confounding, mediator-outcome confounding, and measurement error can bias indirect effects. Sensitivity analysis should report how strong unmeasured confounding would need to be to alter conclusions.

F7. Evaluate overlap and common support

Black and White respondents may occupy substantially different neighborhood distributions, leaving few genuinely comparable cases at extreme levels of disadvantage or advantage. Regression can extrapolate beyond observed overlap. Analysts should graph covariate distributions, report common-support restrictions, and use weighting or matching only where comparisons are credible. A lack of overlap is itself a substantive finding about segregation and unequal exposure.

F8. Conduct robustness and negative-control tests

Robustness checks should vary geographic boundaries, periods, offense definitions, race classifications, missing-data assumptions, and exposure measures. Results should be compared across police, victimization, health, and mortality systems where possible. Negative-control outcomes or exposures can reveal residual selection. Spatial dependence and clustering must be

addressed. Researchers should report null and contradictory results rather than treating them as obstacles to a preferred narrative.

F9. Center victimization and ethical safeguards

Data linkage can create privacy and surveillance risks for people already heavily observed by institutions. Restricted data should be protected, small-area results suppressed when necessary, and community representatives included in governance. Predictive models should not become secret risk lists or proxies for race. The objective is understanding and prevention, not expanding indiscriminate monitoring.

F10. Communicate uncertainty

Every public output should state the population, period, outcome, denominator, and principal limitation. Charts should begin at defensible baselines, display confidence intervals where they affect interpretation, and avoid visually equating uncertain subgroup estimates with precise administrative counts. The executive summary should distinguish findings supported across methods from hypotheses requiring stronger evidence.

Appendix G. Policy Implementation Playbook

G1. Establish a local violence picture

A jurisdiction should integrate homicide, nonfatal shooting, emergency-department, emergency medical service, victimization, and community information while protecting privacy. Analysts should identify recurring places, conflicts, networks, times, and service gaps. Race may be monitored for equity and burden, but operational targeting should be based on recent behavior, victimization, and situational risk. Community validation is essential because administrative data may contain outdated affiliations, duplicate identities, or incidents whose meaning is misunderstood.

G2. Build a governance structure

A credible initiative needs shared authority among residents, victim advocates, public health, outreach, schools, hospitals, service providers, researchers, and law enforcement. The group should define safety outcomes, data-access rules, referral protocols, and public reporting. No partner should be able to quietly convert service data into broad enforcement intelligence. Conflicts of interest and accountability mechanisms should be explicit. Stable leadership matters, but governance should survive changes in mayors, chiefs, or grant cycles.

G3. Protect people at acute risk

Immediate response should include conflict mediation, relocation when credible threats exist, hospital engagement after injury, witness protection, trauma care, and rapid access to basic needs. Programs must have flexible emergency funds and clear twenty-four-hour escalation pathways. A referral that produces a waiting list is not an intervention. Safety plans should be individualized and revisited as conflicts change. Staff with lived experience need professional compensation, supervision, insurance, and protection from burnout and retaliation.

G4. Focus justice resources narrowly and lawfully

Investigative and enforcement attention should prioritize severe, recent harm and credible threats rather than low-level activity used as a proxy for dangerousness. Focused-deterrence communication should be accurate, procedurally fair, and paired with real assistance. Lists should have entry and exit criteria, periodic review, correction processes, and independent auditing for racial and geographic bias. Collective punishment, vague gang labels, and guilt by association damage legitimacy and can sweep in people who are not driving violence.

G5. Strengthen places

Municipal agencies should coordinate lighting, abandoned-property remediation, safe transit, code enforcement that does not displace vulnerable tenants, parks, and activation of public space. Residents should define which changes improve safety and which invite unwanted surveillance or gentrification pressure. Physical improvement should be paired with anti-displacement measures so the people who endured disinvestment benefit from reinvestment.

G6. Expand durable opportunity

Employment programs should offer more than a temporary slot. Participants need transportation, documentation, childcare, record-navigation support, coaching, and pathways to wage growth. Youth programs should pay participants when appropriate and provide sustained adult relationships. Schools should reduce exclusion without ignoring serious safety problems, using fair discipline, restorative processes where suitable, and rapid support for students affected by violence.

G7. Support victims and families

Victim services should begin quickly and persist beyond the news cycle. Families may need funeral assistance, wage replacement, counseling, relocation, legal navigation, school support, and truthful updates from investigators. Services must be accessible regardless of whether a victim cooperates with police or has a criminal record. Treating some victims as less deserving damages both justice and cooperation.

G8. Evaluate in stages

Implementation measures should track whether promised services occurred, how quickly, for whom, and with what retention. Outcome measures should include shootings, homicide, reinjury, retaliation, victimization, resident fear, legitimacy, and harmful justice contact. Comparison groups or phased rollouts should be used when ethical and practical. Evaluation contracts should guarantee publication of unfavorable findings. Programs need adaptation, but uncontrolled changes should be documented so evaluators know what was actually delivered.

G9. Use an improvement cycle

Teams should review cases and trends without blaming individuals for systemic failures. A monthly learning cycle can examine missed opportunities, inaccurate data, service bottlenecks, resident feedback, and unintended consequences. Changes should be tested, documented, and

reassessed. Success should lead to institutionalization and stable funding rather than permanent dependence on short grants. Failure should lead to revision or termination, not rebranding.

G10. Align budgets with risk and protection

Budgets reveal priorities. Jurisdictions should compare spending on emergency response and incarceration with investment in victim services, outreach, treatment, youth development, housing stabilization, environmental remediation, and evaluation. The objective is not an arbitrary transfer from one category to another; it is a portfolio calibrated to local evidence. Costs should be compared with avoided deaths, injuries, trauma, medical care, lost earnings, and justice processing.

Appendix H. Public Communication and Publication Guide

H1. Lead with the distinction between fact and inference

Public communication should acknowledge the statistic before challenging the interpretation. Saying "the number is fake" when it comes from a real FBI table destroys trust. A better opening is: "That table does show a large disparity in recorded arrests; here is what arrests measure, what they do not measure, and what evidence says about the causes underneath the disparity." This approach reduces defensiveness and keeps the argument anchored in accuracy.

H2. Avoid collective language

Use constructions such as "Black adults accounted for a specified share of recorded arrests in a particular table and year," not "Black people commit a share of crime." The latter converts an administrative event into a characteristic of a population that includes millions of children, older adults, victims, caregivers, workers, and people with no justice contact. Precision is not political correctness; it is correct statistical grammar.

H3. Pair offending with victimization

A disparity should never be discussed as though harm falls only on outsiders. Serious violence is often geographically and socially proximate, and communities with high suspected-offender rates can also have high victimization. Centering victims prevents the debate from becoming an abstract contest over racial reputation. It also makes prevention, clearance, trauma services, and witness protection visible policy priorities.

H4. Do not promise that one control erases the gap

Public audiences are rightly skeptical of claims that researchers can "control for everything." Explain what was measured and how estimates changed. Say "the association became smaller after accounting for age, sex, and neighborhood disadvantage in this study," not "environment explains it all." Residual uncertainty is compatible with a strong environmental argument and increases credibility.

H5. Use charts as arguments with limits

A chart should have one claim, a visible denominator, and a source note. Arrest shares should not be plotted beside population shares without age and sex context as though the ratio were causal. Survey estimates with wide confidence intervals should not be displayed with false precision. A

figure that complicates the thesis should remain in the report if it is important; credibility depends on showing the shape of the evidence rather than selecting only supportive images.

H6. Prepare multiple publication formats

The complete report can support a shorter policy brief, an academic article focused on the conceptual model, a methods article on measurement, an op-ed, a media fact sheet, and a presentation. Each derivative should preserve the core definitions and source limitations. Shortening must remove detail without changing the meaning of the evidence. Headlines should be reviewed for claims the body does not support.

H7. Seek adversarial review

Before publication, invite reviewers from criminology, public health, statistics, policing, community violence intervention, victim advocacy, and perspectives skeptical of the thesis. Ask each reviewer to identify the strongest unsupported claim, omitted evidence, misleading phrase, and policy risk. Review should include people from communities directly affected by violence and criminal-justice contact. Disagreement should be documented and resolved through evidence or explicit limitation.

H8. Publication integrity statement

The final public edition should disclose the author's role, research assistance, data and graphics methods, conflicts of interest, funding, and whether generative AI assisted drafting or design. All claims should be independently checked against cited sources before submission. The author remains responsible for the argument and accuracy. A transparent process strengthens rather than diminishes authorship.

Appendix I. Research Agenda

The existing evidence is strong enough to reject race as a sufficient causal explanation and to support multilevel environmental mechanisms. It is not strong enough to assign one final percentage of the disparity to each cause. The following research priorities would materially improve knowledge and policy.

I1. Link victimization, health, and justice records without expanding surveillance

Many nonfatal shootings appear in hospital data even when police information is incomplete, while police files contain incident and investigation detail absent from medical records. Privacy-preserving linkage could improve estimates of injury, repeat victimization, retaliation, clearance, and service use. Governance must prevent linked data from becoming a generalized intelligence system. Independent oversight, community representation, minimum-necessary access, audit logs, retention limits, and explicit prohibitions on secondary enforcement use should be built into the research design.

I2. Measure exposure through daily activity spaces

Residential census tracts approximate only one part of a person's environment. School, work, transit, social networks, online conflict, and routine travel can create exposure outside the home neighborhood. Future studies should combine ethically collected activity-space measures with residential context while minimizing reidentification. This may clarify why people living in the same tract experience different risks and why neighborhood racial composition sometimes appears predictive after limited residential controls.

I3. Study low-violence disadvantaged communities

Research often samples places because violence is high, making protective processes harder to see. Comparative studies should identify economically disadvantaged communities with persistently low serious violence and examine organizations, informal control, leadership, family networks, firearm practices, legitimacy, and opportunity. The relevant question is not only why violence rises but how safety is produced under constraint. These cases can generate interventions that build existing strengths rather than importing models from outside.

I4. Separate forms of serious violence

Street conflict, robbery, intimate-partner violence, sexual violence, child abuse, organized-market violence, and homicide connected to other felonies have different mechanisms. Aggregate

violent-crime indices can conceal opposing trends and misleading racial comparisons. Future models should define theoretically coherent outcomes, examine overlap among pathways, and avoid extending the survival-adaptation framework where coercive control, predation, or other mechanisms are more appropriate.

I5. Improve measurement of cumulative load and protective reserve

The breaking-point model requires measures of recurring victimization, bereavement, housing and financial instability, sleep, discrimination, family strain, perceived threat, legal cynicism, coping, social support, and weapon access over time. Researchers should test whether cumulative measures predict acute escalation better than one-time hardship indicators. Protective reserve—the relationships, resources, skills, and credible alternatives available during crisis—should be measured with equal care.

I6. Test interruption mechanisms

Interventions often report whether violence declined without identifying why. Evaluations should measure mediators such as conflict resolution, weapon separation, perceived certainty of consequences, service uptake, trust, future orientation, and reduced exposure. Understanding mechanism helps distinguish a program model from local implementation and improves transfer. It also reveals when apparent success comes from displacement, suppressed reporting, or unrelated citywide change.

I7. Quantify the consequences of low homicide clearance

Low clearance may affect violence through reduced deterrence, diminished trust, witness fear, private retaliation, and grief without resolution. Studies should examine whether improvements in lawful investigative capacity and victim-family communication reduce subsequent violence, controlling for broader police activity. Clearance should be measured as more than an agency performance statistic; it is a potential neighborhood exposure and legitimacy mechanism.

I8. Compare policy packages rather than isolated programs

Cities rarely implement one intervention in isolation. Outreach, focused deterrence, environmental remediation, youth jobs, police reforms, and economic changes overlap. Designs using phased implementation, synthetic controls, interrupted time series, and mixed methods can estimate package effects and identify synergy. Cost-effectiveness analysis should include medical, victim, family, labor-market, and justice costs—not only program budgets or arrest savings.

I9. Examine who benefits and who bears costs

An average reduction can conceal displacement, unequal service access, harmful contacts, or benefits concentrated outside the most affected community. Every evaluation should stratify outcomes by age, sex, race and ethnicity, geography, prior victimization, and relevant vulnerability while respecting statistical power. Qualitative evidence from residents, victims, and participants can identify burdens absent from administrative data. Equity is an outcome to measure, not an assumption attached to program intent.

I10. Build cumulative evidence through replication

High-profile one-city findings should be replicated across regions, periods, and institutional contexts using consistent outcomes and transparent code. Null results are essential for estimating realistic effects. Funders should support multi-site collaborations, long follow-up, harmonized measures, and publication regardless of direction. The field needs fewer claims that one program "solved" violence and more cumulative knowledge about which mechanisms work, for whom, under what conditions, and at what cost.

Appendix J. Study-by-Study Findings Matrix

This appendix exposes the evidentiary spine of the report. It does not assign a mechanical quality score or pretend that unlike studies can be averaged into one causal estimate. Each profile identifies the design, contribution, limitation, and exact claim the source can responsibly support.

J1. FBI arrest tables, 2019

Field	Assessment
Design	Administrative arrest counts
Principal contribution	Adult murder arrests were 51.3% Black and 45.7% White among reported race categories.
Primary limitation	Arrests are selected events; Hispanic origin is separate; agency and case processes matter.
Responsible use	Descriptive arrest composition only.

J2. FBI expanded homicide data, 2019

Field	Assessment
Design	Incident-based homicide records
Principal contribution	Victim and known-offender compositions broadly converge on a large disparity.
Primary limitation	Thousands of offenders had unknown race; clearance and reporting condition offender data.
Responsible use	The lethal-violence disparity is not solely a low-level arrest artifact.

J3. BJS violent victimization, 2008–2021

Field	Assessment
Design	National household survey
Principal contribution	Provides population rates including incidents not reported to police.
Primary limitation	Excludes homicide and institutional populations; offender traits are victim-perceived.
Responsible use	Broad violence and specific offenses must be separated.

J4. CDC firearm homicide, 2019–2022

Field	Assessment
Design	Mortality surveillance
Principal contribution	Documents rapid, unequal rate increases and partial decline.
Primary limitation	Crude rates do not adjust age or sex and do not identify offenders.
Responsible use	Racial burden is large but historically variable, not fixed.

J5. CDC YRBS, 2021

Field	Assessment
Design	Cross-sectional school survey
Principal contribution	Community-violence exposure is associated with youth gun carrying within several groups.
Primary limitation	Temporal order is imperfect; self-report and subgroup uncertainty matter.
Responsible use	Threat exposure is a cross-group mechanism, not a racial trait.

J6. Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997

Field	Assessment
Design	Multilevel observational study
Principal contribution	Neighborhood social organization contributes beyond measured individual composition.
Primary limitation	One historical city; residual confounding; the construct is not one intervention.
Responsible use	Place-level organization is empirically relevant.

J7. Sampson, Morenoff & Raudenbush, 2005

Field	Assessment
Design	Longitudinal multilevel study
Principal contribution	Shows the importance of neighborhood inequality and limited overlap in lived environments.
Primary limitation	Model-dependent attenuation; cannot measure every pathway.
Responsible use	Race coefficients change when environmental exposures are modeled.

J8. Harding, 2009

Field	Assessment
Design	Longitudinal neighborhood study
Principal contribution	Connects violence exposure to adolescent outcomes beyond an isolated incident.
Primary limitation	Selection and time-varying confounding remain possible.
Responsible use	Violence is both an outcome and a reproducing exposure.

J9. Kirk & Papachristos, 2011

Field	Assessment
Design	Neighborhood cultural-mechanism study
Principal contribution	Links institutional distrust and neighborhood conditions to cultural adaptation.
Primary limitation	Measurement and reciprocal causation complicate causal direction.

Field	Assessment
Responsible use	Culture can be an adaptive mediator rather than racial essence.

J10. Stewart & Simons, 2010

Field	Assessment
Design	Individual and contextual modeling
Principal contribution	Tests behavioral scripts and structural context simultaneously.
Primary limitation	Self-report and sample context limit generalization.
Responsible use	Retaliatory norms are conditional and learned.

J11. Poulson et al., 2021

Field	Assessment
Design	Historical-spatial structural equation model
Principal contribution	Connects institutional history, modern disadvantage, and firearm harm.
Primary limitation	Boundaries and populations changed; mediation assumptions are strong.
Responsible use	Historical policy remains relevant to present spatial risk.

J12. Branas et al., 2018

Field	Assessment
Design	Citywide cluster randomized trial
Principal contribution	Assigned environmental treatment finds beneficial safety outcomes.
Primary limitation	Effects vary by outcome and context; mechanisms are bundled.
Responsible use	Physical environment belongs in a prevention portfolio.

J13. Garvin, Cannuscio & Branas, 2013

Field	Assessment
Design	Randomized vacant-lot trial
Principal contribution	Demonstrates feasible place change with measured outcomes.
Primary limitation	Local scope and treatment compliance constrain transfer.
Responsible use	Environmental remediation can change safety without arrest.

J14. Kondo et al., 2016

Field	Assessment
Design	Quasi-experimental place study
Principal contribution	Adds spatial and community-reuse evidence to the remediation literature.

Field	Assessment
Primary limitation	Nonrandom reuse and displacement must be considered.
Responsible use	Community use and guardianship are plausible mechanisms.

J15. Braga, Weisburd & Turchan, 2018/2019

Field	Assessment
Design	Systematic review and meta-analysis
Principal contribution	Finds a statistically significant moderate average focused-deterrence effect.
Primary limitation	Stronger designs show smaller effects; program content varies.
Responsible use	Focused deterrence can help when carefully implemented and audited.

J16. National Academies, 2023

Field	Assessment
Design	Consensus synthesis
Principal contribution	Integrates crime, victimization, policing, courts, incarceration, and supervision.
Primary limitation	Breadth depends on an uneven underlying literature.
Responsible use	Disparity emerges through interacting social and institutional systems.

J17. CDC violence-prevention resource

Field	Assessment
Design	Evidence synthesis for practice
Principal contribution	Supports coordinated individual, relational, community, and societal action.
Primary limitation	Strategy menus do not guarantee local fidelity or effect.
Responsible use	A portfolio is more defensible than a single-program cure.

J18. Census poverty and ACS products

Field	Assessment
Design	Population and neighborhood measurement
Principal contribution	Supplies essential context and rate denominators.
Primary limitation	Tracts are proxies; income is not wealth or social organization.
Responsible use	Environmental claims require explicit, correctly scaled measures.

Appendix K. Review, Reproducibility, and Claim-Audit Protocol

This manuscript is a synthesis and conceptual argument, not a registered systematic review. The protocol below defines how a publication edition should be checked, updated, and made reproducible before journal submission or public release. The subject is politically charged, and errors can stigmatize communities or weaken legitimate safety policy.

K1. Source hierarchy

Trace numerical claims first to official tables, technical documentation, or original peer-reviewed studies. Use consensus reports and systematic reviews to frame bodies of evidence. Secondary summaries may identify leads but should not carry contested quantitative claims when a primary source is available.

K2. Inclusion rules

Include research that defines its violence outcome, population, period, geography, comparison, and design. For causal claims, require credible temporal or counterfactual leverage, transparent covariates, or a design that changes the exposure. Include null and contradictory findings.

K3. Exclusion and downgrade rules

Exclude claims that merge race and Hispanic origin without explanation, substitute arrest composition for prevalence, omit denominators, or infer individuals from neighborhood averages. Downgrade severe missingness, unstable subgroup samples, unclear boundaries, post-treatment controls, and untested design assumptions.

K4. Search and update plan

Search criminology, public health, sociology, economics, psychology, and policy databases using combinations of homicide, robbery, firearm violence, victimization, segregation, disadvantage, collective efficacy, legal cynicism, exposure, deterrence, outreach, hospital intervention, vacant land, youth employment, and clearance. Record database, date, exact string, filters, and result count.

K5. Claim ledger

For every number, record value, unit, denominator, dates, category definition, source location, retrieval date, and calculation. For every causal statement, name the supporting design and strongest alternative explanation. Label conceptual statements as synthesis or hypothesis.

K6. Independent verification

A second reviewer should reproduce every high-salience statistic and all chart values. Resolve disagreements against original tables or author documentation. Remove or mark provisional any value that cannot be reproduced. Inspect axes, labels, colors, and captions for visual overstatement.

K7. Sensitivity expectations

Test age standardization, sex stratification, alternative geographic units, mutually exclusive race and ethnicity categories, missing-data assumptions, clustered uncertainty, nonlinear age, and models with and without mediators. Test place-based spillovers and time-series pretrends.

K8. Community and victim review

Reviewers with lived experience of victimization, bereavement, investigation, intervention, and justice contact should assess framing, missing outcomes, and foreseeable misuse. Document their concerns and give written reasons for material decisions.

K9. Versioning and corrections

Display a version date and maintain a correction log. Preserve earlier figures when data update so readers can distinguish revised estimates from changed history. Summarize substantive changes to the thesis, evidence grade, or policy recommendations.

K10. Required extraction fields

Domain	Required fields
Citation	Authors, year, title, journal or agency, stable identifier
Design	Cross-sectional, longitudinal, multilevel, quasi-experimental, randomized, review
Population	Age, sex, category definition, geography, dates, sample size
Outcome	Incident, victimization, death, arrest, conviction, incarceration, perception
Estimate	Effect measure, uncertainty, reference group, specification
Missingness	Unknown offender, nonresponse, coverage, attrition
Bias assessment	Confounding, selection, measurement, spillover, generalizability
Claim mapping	Exact manuscript section supported

K11. Publication-readiness checklist

- Every chart value is independently reproduced.
- Every percentage identifies the selected population and denominator.

- Race and Hispanic-origin definitions are explicit.
- Unknown offender and missing-data shares accompany offender composition.
- Claims about offending are not supported only by arrest or incarceration.
- Victimization and community harm receive equal analytic attention.
- Causal language matches design strength.
- Counterevidence, null findings, and implementation failures are represented.
- Policy recommendations include guardrails, metrics, and exit conditions.
- Technical, victim, and community reviewers complete adversarial review.
- Funding, conflicts, research assistance, and generative-AI assistance are disclosed.
- Accessible Word and PDF editions pass visual and accessibility checks.

Appendix L. Questions for Adversarial Review

A flagship paper should be tested by readers who disagree with its premises as well as those sympathetic to its goals. These prompts are designed to expose overclaiming, missing evidence, weak measurement, policy risk, and rhetoric that could be misused. A publication team should record the answer, evidence, revision, and unresolved disagreement for every question.

L1. For criminologists

- Does the manuscript keep homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, firearm injury, and justice-system outcomes analytically distinct? Identify every passage where an aggregate category conceals a different mechanism or trend.
- Which causal pathways are underdeveloped—illegal markets, routine activities, peer diffusion, intimate-partner coercion, substance use, weapon availability, developmental neuropsychology, or deterrence? State whether the omission changes the thesis or only its scope.
- Where does the manuscript rely on a classic finding that has not replicated across places or periods? Identify the strongest contrary study and specify what language should be narrowed.

L2. For statisticians and methodologists

- Does every percentage have the correct denominator and selected population? Check whether any comparison silently moves among incidents, people, arrests, known offenders, victims, and residents.
- Where could conditioning on arrest, clearance, neighborhood residence, or known offender status create collider or selection bias? Diagram the most consequential selection process and recommend a sensitivity analysis.
- Do claims about attenuation after controls distinguish confounders from mediators and consequences? Identify post-treatment controls and describe what the adjusted coefficient can and cannot mean.

L3. For public-health reviewers

- Does the report adequately treat violent victimization, trauma, disability, bereavement, and fear as health outcomes rather than treating arrests as the central event?
- Are shared risk and protective factors connected to specific intervention mechanisms, populations, and time horizons? Identify any recommendation that lacks a plausible delivery system.

- Does the firearm discussion separate access, carrying, storage, market supply, lethality, suicide, intimate-partner homicide, and interpersonal conflict rather than treating guns as one exposure?

L4. For law-enforcement and legal reviewers

- Which measurement cautions are accurate for modern NIBRS, supplementary homicide records, arrest tables, and clearance data, and which require jurisdiction-specific qualification?
- Can focused enforcement criteria be tied to recent serious conduct, credible threats, or victimization rather than race, geography, association, or unreviewed intelligence? Specify due-process, audit, correction, entry, and exit requirements.
- Does the report give sufficient weight to investigative capacity, witness protection, evidence quality, procedural fairness, and communication with victims' families as violence-prevention mechanisms?

L5. For community violence-intervention practitioners

- Does the account accurately describe how conflicts escalate, how retaliation is prevented, and how trust can be lost? Identify language that sounds plausible academically but fails operationally.
- Which services are routinely promised but unavailable, delayed, unsafe, or too short-lived? Translate each abstract recommendation into staff, hours, caseload, referral capacity, transportation, confidentiality, and supervision.
- How might data-sharing with police, hospitals, schools, or researchers expose participants or workers? Specify minimum-necessary access and prohibited secondary uses.

L6. For victims, survivors, and families

- Does the manuscript recognize victims whose histories do not fit a simple innocent-versus-offender divide? Identify any passage that makes compassion conditional on cooperation, background, or public sympathy.
- Are grief, lost income, relocation, funeral cost, school disruption, medical debt, disability, and the need for truthful investigative updates visible enough in the policy agenda?
- Which proposed outcome measures would capture whether families feel safer, respected, informed, and supported—not merely whether an agency recorded fewer incidents?

L7. For historians and segregation scholars

- Does the historical account show specific institutional mechanisms linking housing, credit, municipal investment, mobility, wealth, and neighborhood risk, or does it jump too quickly from a map to a modern outcome?
- Where have neighborhood populations, boundaries, and institutions changed enough to weaken a redlining comparison? Identify modern policies that sustain or interrupt the historical pathway.
- Does the manuscript distinguish historical explanation from inevitability and make room for organizational agency, migration, political change, and low-violence disadvantaged communities?

L8. For skeptical reviewers of the thesis

- What is the strongest evidence that remains difficult for the environmental account to explain? State it in its strongest form and identify whether the report answers it with evidence, assumption, or rhetoric.
- Which residual disparities persist in well-measured, well-overlapped samples after age, sex, place, exposure, and socioeconomic factors are considered? What additional mechanisms could be tested without naming race itself as a cause?
- Which policy supported here has failed, produced harm, displaced violence, or lost legitimacy? Specify the boundary condition rather than treating implementation failure as irrelevant.

L9. For editors and public communicators

- Could any headline, pull quote, chart, or isolated sentence be used to claim that a racial group is inherently violent or, conversely, that severe violence is merely a statistical illusion? Revise for accuracy without hiding the finding.
- Does the executive summary state the hard empirical fact, the measurement limits, the explanatory thesis, the role of agency, and the policy implication in language a nonspecialist can repeat correctly?
- Are terms such as structural, environmental, culture, disparity, control, mediation, adaptation, and breaking point defined tightly enough to avoid becoming slogans?

L10. Decision standard

- The paper is ready when a skeptical reader can locate the source, denominator, design, limitation, and level of inference behind every central claim without guessing.

- The paper is ready when its policy recommendations specify who acts, on what timeline, with what authority, resources, protections, metrics, and stopping rules.
- The paper is ready when it can acknowledge real unequal violence, unequal victimization, biased or selective measurement, human agency, and structural inequality at the same time—without using one truth to erase another.

Appendix M. Verified Core-Claims Register

This register records the audit status of the report's most consequential quantitative and causal claims. "Verified" means that the stated value or bibliographic fact was matched to the named original source during preparation of this edition. It does not mean the source itself is free from measurement error, selection, or design limitations. Those limitations remain part of the claim.

Claim	Audited statement	Primary source	Status	Boundary
2019 adult murder arrests	Black 51.3%; White 45.7%; other races 3.0%.	FBI, Crime in the United States 2019, Table 43	Verified	Recorded adult arrests; race and Hispanic origin are separate fields.
2019 homicide victims	Of victims with known race: Black 54.7%; White 42.3%; other 3.1%; 234 unknown.	FBI Expanded Homicide Data, Tables 1–2	Verified	Supplementary reports covered 13,927 victims; descriptive, not causal.
2019 known homicide offenders	Of offenders with known race: Black 55.9%; White 41.1%; other 3.0%; 4,752 unknown.	FBI Expanded Homicide Data, Table 3	Verified	Conditioned on known offender race; clearance and missingness matter.
Sex concentration in homicide	78.3% of reported murder victims were male; 88% of adult murder arrestees were male.	FBI Expanded Homicide Data Table 1; Arrest Table 42/43	Verified	Different selected populations; not an estimate of individual propensity.
NCVS robbery victimization, 2017–2021	Per 1,000 persons age 12+: Black 2.8; Hispanic 2.5; White 1.6.	BJS, Violent Victimization by Race or Hispanic Origin, 2008–2021	Verified	Survey estimates; excludes homicide and institutional populations.
Firearm-homicide rate, 2022	Total 5.9 per 100,000; non-Hispanic Black 27.5; non-Hispanic White 2.0.	Kegler, Simon, & Sumner, MMWR 2023	Verified	Crude mortality rates; burden measure, not offender attribution.

Appendix M. Verified Core-Claims Register (continued)

Claim	Audited statement	Primary source	Status	Boundary
Firearm-homicide change, 2019–2022	Total rate rose from 4.4 to 5.9; 5,223 more deaths occurred in 2022 than 2019.	Kegler, Simon, & Sumner, MMWR 2023	Verified	Descriptive period comparison; pandemic mechanisms are not isolated.
Youth violence exposure and gun carrying	Overall, 19.9% witnessed community violence and 3.5% carried a gun in the prior year.	Harper et al., MMWR 2023	Verified	Cross-sectional self-report; association does not prove causation.
Collective efficacy and violence	Collective efficacy was negatively associated with violence after modeled individual and structural factors.	Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, Science 1997	Verified citation and design	Observational Chicago study; residual confounding and transfer limits remain.
Racial disparity and neighborhood context	Longitudinal multilevel analysis examined individual, family, and neighborhood factors together.	Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, AJPH 2005	Verified citation and design	Model-dependent findings from a specific cohort and city.
Vacant-land remediation	A citywide cluster randomized trial tested standardized vacant-land treatments and reported effects on violence, crime, and fear.	Branas et al., PNAS 2018	Verified citation and design	Outcome- and neighborhood-specific effects; treatment bundles mechanisms.
Focused deterrence	Systematic review found a statistically significant, moderate average crime-reduction effect; stronger designs were smaller.	Braga, Weisburd, & Turchan, Campbell 2019	Verified citation and conclusion	Programs and evaluations vary; most evidence is quasi-experimental.

How to use this register

A reader should quote the audited statement together with its boundary. For example, the FBI offender percentage is a percentage among offenders whose race was known, not among all offenders and not among all residents. The CDC firearm-homicide rate describes victim mortality, not offender identity. The NCVS rates describe nonfatal victimization among persons age twelve or older. Removing those conditions changes the claim and is not supported by this report.

The conceptual claims—survival adaptation, cumulative load, protective reserve, and the breaking-point model—are integrative hypotheses grounded in several literatures. They are not presented as directly validated scales or as a complete causal decomposition of racial disparity. Future research should operationalize and test them prospectively.

Appendix N. Adversarial Evidence Audit

This audit asks a deliberately hostile question: what evidence would make the manuscript's environmental account fail? Each challenge is stated in its strongest defensible form. The response then distinguishes four possible outcomes: the challenge defeats the thesis, materially narrows it, identifies a genuine unresolved question, or is compatible with the thesis once categories and causal claims are stated correctly. The purpose is not to "win" every argument. Where opposing evidence is sound, the report concedes it and changes the scope of its claim.

N1. Challenge: adjusted racial differences sometimes remain

The strongest objection is not that adjustment changes nothing. It is that some studies retain a statistically significant Black–White difference after measured individual, family, and neighborhood factors are included. Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush reported that a disparity remained in their Chicago cohort even as contextual and individual variables explained substantial variation. A residual can therefore be real in the statistical model.

This evidence defeats any claim that available environmental controls erase every disparity. The manuscript no longer makes that claim. It does not establish a racial essence, because residual coefficients inherit measurement error, omitted exposures, limited overlap, model form, and category construction. The correct conclusion is narrower: measured context explains part, not necessarily all, of the observed association. The unexplained portion remains an empirical target rather than proof of a named cause.

N2. Challenge: culture can have an independent behavioral effect

Code-of-the-street research finds that beliefs favoring retaliation, toughness, and violent responses are associated with violent delinquency. A reader could argue that culture is not merely a reflection of poverty because people exposed to similar material conditions vary in their beliefs, and those beliefs can predict behavior after structural controls. Reviews conducted twenty-five years after Anderson's original work conclude that the framework has substantial empirical support while also identifying measurement, causal-order, and generalizability problems (Stewart & Simons, 2010; Fader & León, 2024).

This challenge materially strengthens the role of culture but does not convert culture into a racial possession. The revised thesis treats cultural scripts as partially autonomous mediators: once learned, reinforced by peers, and rewarded by local status systems, they can persist and affect conduct even when immediate material circumstances improve. Policy must therefore address

norms, conflict scripts, and credible alternatives—not assume that income alone automatically changes behavior.

N3. Challenge: family structure and parenting predict delinquency

Meta-analytic evidence links parenting dimensions—including monitoring, rejection, hostility, and support—with delinquency. A systematic review of 48 studies also found that growing up in a single-parent family was associated with elevated adolescent criminal involvement, while emphasizing heterogeneity and the need to distinguish separation, death, and being born to a single parent (Hoeve et al., 2009; Kroese et al., 2021). Dismissing family processes as mere political rhetoric would contradict the evidence.

This evidence narrows the manuscript's earlier caution but does not support the claim that "father absence explains everything." Family structure is not equivalent to parenting quality, supervision, conflict, economic resources, incarceration, bereavement, or access to supportive adults. Some associations remain after controls, while selection and shared causes remain difficult to eliminate. The defensible conclusion is that family stability and parenting processes are genuine causal candidates embedded in, and sometimes transmitting, broader inequality.

N4. Challenge: firearms may be a major driver rather than a modifier

The original framework describes firearms as increasing lethality and compressing the time available for de-escalation. Opposing evidence can go further: ecological longitudinal studies have reported positive associations between firearm ownership proxies and firearm-homicide rates, even after multiple state-level covariates, while later research has produced smaller or specification-sensitive estimates. Firearm laws also show heterogeneous and sometimes uncertain effects across designs (Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013).

This challenge does not defeat the environmental account because firearm prevalence, access, carrying, storage, and market supply are environmental exposures. It does defeat any version of the thesis that treats weapons as a minor final-stage detail. The revised interpretation gives firearms an independent place in the causal portfolio while acknowledging that state-level ownership estimates are imperfect and that reverse causation and policy endogeneity complicate inference.

N5. Challenge: concentrated disadvantage is not the same as poverty

If the argument is summarized as "poverty causes crime," it fails. Most poor people do not offend, many disadvantaged neighborhoods maintain low violence, and some forms of violence occur in

affluent settings. Studies also show that residential instability, ethnic heterogeneity, alcohol outlets, illegal markets, collective efficacy, segregation, and network structure can predict violence differently from income. Kuhl, Warner, and Wilczak found robust disadvantage effects across neighborhood types while also documenting a larger racialized urban structure.

This evidence forces conceptual precision rather than abandonment. Concentrated disadvantage is a bundled spatial condition, not a synonym for low household income. The thesis survives only in multilevel form: material resources interact with organization, exposure, routine activities, weapons, peers, institutions, and history. A one-variable poverty explanation is rejected.

N6. Challenge: police bias cannot explain lethal victimization

Homicide mortality, victim records, emergency treatment, and known-offender data display serious unequal burdens. Differential stops or arrests cannot manufacture a death certificate. The convergence between 2019 victim and known-offender compositions is therefore strong evidence against a policing-only explanation. Treating all disparity as a recording artifact would erase victims and fail empirically.

This challenge is accepted. The report explicitly rejects a policing-only account. Bias and enforcement selection remain important for stops, low-level offenses, suspect development, clearance, diversion, conviction, and cumulative contact. They can alter measured composition and future opportunity without explaining the full homicide burden. Both propositions can be true at once.

N7. Challenge: biological and individual differences matter

Temperament, impulsivity, neurodevelopment, psychiatric symptoms, substance response, cognition, and heritable individual variation can influence aggression or antisocial behavior. An environmental account that denies individual heterogeneity would be incomplete. Behavioral traits can also evoke or select environments, making causation bidirectional.

The evidence supports individual differences but not the substitution of broad U.S. racial labels for measured biological mechanisms. National Academies guidance warns that race is a misleading proxy for human genetic variation, and modern genetic scholarship rejects naive racial substructure. A valid biological claim must measure the trait or variant, demonstrate a pathway to a defined outcome, address ancestry and environment, and replicate. No source reviewed for this report establishes a racial-genetic cause of the observed U.S. violent-crime disparity. The unresolved question concerns individual biosocial variation within populations, not racial essence.

N8. Challenge: offending can worsen environments

Neighborhood conditions do not flow in one direction. Violence can drive businesses and residents away, reduce property values, weaken trust, increase policing and incarceration, disrupt schools, and discourage investment. Families with resources may leave high-risk places, while people with prior offending or victimization may become concentrated through housing and labor-market constraints. Cross-sectional associations can therefore confuse cause, consequence, and selection.

This challenge materially limits simple causal language. The report's feedback model incorporates reciprocal causation, but many cited observational studies cannot estimate every loop. Longitudinal, quasi-experimental, randomized, and historical designs improve inference without eliminating all bias. The thesis is best understood as a dynamic system claim, not a one-way arrow from neighborhood poverty to an individual act.

N9. Challenge: interventions have mixed and local effects

Focused deterrence, outreach, hospital-based programs, youth employment, greening, and police reforms do not work uniformly. Systematic reviews often combine heterogeneous models, stronger evaluations can yield smaller effects, implementation failure is common, and successful one-city trials may not transfer. Publication bias and outcome selection can exaggerate confidence. Some firearm-policy estimates also change with specification and comparison group.

This challenge defeats any promise that a named program is a universal solution. It supports the portfolio and evaluation approach only if programs have explicit mechanisms, fidelity measures, comparison strategies, equity safeguards, and stopping rules. A null or harmful result must lead to revision or termination rather than rebranding. The report's policy confidence is therefore conditional, not absolute.

N10. Challenge: the survival-adaptation model may be too broad

Vigilance, weapon carrying, retaliation, distrust, shortened time horizons, and reputation defense do not necessarily arise from one latent survival process. The label could become unfalsifiable if every response to adversity is called adaptive after the fact. It may also fit retaliatory street conflict better than intimate-partner coercion, predatory violence, sexual violence, child abuse, ideologically motivated attacks, or violence during psychosis.

This challenge identifies the manuscript's most important unresolved theoretical weakness. The model is retained as an integrative hypothesis, not a validated scale or universal theory. It should

be tested prospectively against competing models, with preregistered measures of cumulative load, threat appraisal, coping, protective reserve, acute precipitants, and specific violence outcomes. Failure to predict beyond established risk factors would require narrowing or abandoning it.

N11. Challenge: race may proxy unmeasured factors even after place is modeled

People of different racial groups living in the same census tract may still experience different schools, policing, discrimination, wealth, family histories, social networks, daily activity spaces, and exposure to violence. Conversely, statistical models may attribute too much to race when neighborhood variables are coarse, or too much to neighborhood when residential selection is ignored. Limited common support can make adjusted comparisons depend on extrapolation.

This does not supply a competing causal mechanism; it shows why a residual race coefficient is difficult to interpret. Stronger studies need matched or weighted samples with overlap diagnostics, repeated exposure measures, activity-space data, wealth and network measures, and transparent sensitivity analysis. The honest result may remain partial identification rather than one final percentage explained.

N12. Audit verdict

Proposition	Audit result	Reason
All disparity disappears after controls	Rejected	Some adjusted gaps remain; the report now states partial attenuation only.
Culture is irrelevant	Rejected	Norms and scripts can independently mediate and sustain violence risk.
Family processes are merely proxies	Rejected	Parenting and family stability have genuine predictive and plausible causal roles.
Police bias creates the entire disparity	Rejected	Mortality and victimization evidence show a real unequal violence burden.
Race is a sufficient biological cause	Unsupported	Broad racial labels do not identify a biological mechanism or valid genomic grouping.
Environment means poverty alone	Rejected	Place, organization, networks, weapons, institutions, and history are distinct.
One proven program solves the problem	Rejected	Effects are heterogeneous and implementation-dependent.
Survival adaptation is already validated	Rejected	It remains a bounded, falsifiable hypothesis requiring prospective testing.
The central environmental thesis survives	Provisionally supported	Multiple data sources and designs support environmental mechanisms, but not a complete decomposition.

What changed because of the audit

- Residual adjusted disparities are treated as real model findings rather than rhetorically dismissed.
- Culture, parenting, family stability, firearms, and individual heterogeneity receive stronger independent roles.
- Police selection is limited to the stages it can plausibly influence and is not used to explain away mortality.
- The survival-adaptation and breaking-point concepts are labeled as hypotheses with explicit failure conditions.
- Policy claims are conditional on design, implementation, safeguards, local context, and evaluation.
- No final percentage of racial disparity is assigned to any mechanism because the available evidence cannot identify one.

References

Armstead, T. L., Wilkins, N., & Nation, M. (2021). Structural and social determinants of inequities in violence risk. American Journal of Public Health, 111(S1), S57–S63.

Benson, M. L., Fox, G. L., DeMaris, A., & Van Wyk, J. (2003). Neighborhood disadvantage, individual economic distress and violence against women in intimate relationships. Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 19(3), 207–235. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024930208331

Braga, A. A., Weisburd, D. L., & Turchan, B. (2019). Focused deterrence strategies effects on crime: A systematic review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 15(3), e1051. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1051

Branas, C. C., South, E., Kondo, M. C., et al. (2018). Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115(12), 2946–2951. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1718503115

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2023). Violent Victimization by Race or Hispanic Origin, 2008–2021. U.S. Department of Justice.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2025). Criminal Victimization, 2024. U.S. Department of Justice.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Community Violence Prevention: Resource for Action. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). About Community Violence.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2020). Crime in the United States, 2019: Table 43, Arrests by Race and Ethnicity. https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2020). Crime in the United States, 2019: Expanded Homicide Data Tables 1–3 and 6. https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/expanded-homicide

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2025). FBI Releases 2024 Reported Crimes in the Nation Statistics.

Fader, J. J., & León, K. S. (2024). Code of the street 25 years later: Lasting legacies, empirical status, and future directions. Annual Review of Criminology, 7, 19–38. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-022422-123641

Garvin, E. C., Cannuscio, C. C., & Branas, C. C. (2013). Greening vacant lots to reduce violent crime: A randomised controlled trial. Injury Prevention, 19, 198–203.

Graif, C., Gladfelter, A. S., & Matthews, S. A. (2014). Urban poverty and neighborhood effects on crime: Incorporating spatial and network perspectives. Sociology Compass, 8, 1140–1155.

Harding, D. J. (2009). Collateral consequences of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Social Forces, 88, 757–784.

Hoeve, M., Dubas, J. S., Eichelsheim, V. I., van der Laan, P. H., Smeenk, W., & Gerris, J. R. M. (2009). The relationship between parenting and delinquency: A meta-analysis. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 37(6), 749–775. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-009-9310-8

Harper, C. R., Li, J., Sheats, K., et al. (2023). Witnessing community violence, gun carrying, and associations with substance use and suicide risk among high school students—United States, 2021. MMWR Supplements, 72(1), 22–28.

Kegler, S. R., Simon, T. R., & Sumner, S. A. (2023). Notes from the field: Firearm homicide rates, by race and ethnicity—United States, 2019–2022. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 72(42), 1149–1150. https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7242a4

Kirk, D. S., & Papachristos, A. V. (2011). Cultural mechanisms and the persistence of neighborhood violence. American Journal of Sociology, 116(4), 1190–1233. https://doi.org/10.1086/655754

Kondo, M. C., Hohl, B. C., Han, S., & Branas, C. C. (2016). Effects of greening and community reuse of vacant lots on crime. Urban Studies, 53, 3279–3295.

Kroese, J., Bernasco, W., Liefbroer, A. C., & Rouwendal, J. (2021). Growing up in single-parent families and the criminal involvement of adolescents: A systematic review. Psychology, Crime & Law, 27(1), 61–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2020.1774589

Kuhl, D. C., Warner, B. D., & Wilczak, A. (2009). Segregation, racial structure, and neighborhood violent crime. American Journal of Sociology, 114(6), 1765–1802. https://doi.org/10.1086/597285

Macdonald, J., Nguyen, V., Jensen, S. T., & Branas, C. C. (2022). Reducing crime by remediating vacant lots: The moderating effect of nearby land uses. Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18, 639–664. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-020-09452-9

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth. National Academies Press.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2023). Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice, and Policy. National Academies Press.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2023). Using Population Descriptors in Genetics and Genomics Research: A New Framework for an Evolving Field. National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26902

Poulson, M., Neufeld, M. Y., Dechert, T., Allee, L., & Kenzik, K. M. (2021). Historic redlining, structural racism, and firearm violence: A structural equation modeling approach. The Lancet Regional Health—Americas, 3.

Sampson, R. J. (2012). Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect. University of Chicago Press.

Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Raudenbush, S. W. (2005). Social anatomy of racial and ethnic disparities in violence. American Journal of Public Health, 95(2), 224–232. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2004.037705

Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. Science, 277(5328), 918–924. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.277.5328.918

Sampson, R. J., & Wilson, W. J. (1995). Toward a theory of race, crime, and urban inequality. In J. Hagan & R. D. Peterson (Eds.), Crime and Inequality. Stanford University Press.

Siegel, M., Ross, C. S., & King, C. (2013). The relationship between gun ownership and firearm homicide rates in the United States, 1981–2010. American Journal of Public Health, 103(11), 2098–2105. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301409

Stewart, E. A., & Simons, R. L. (2010). Race, code of the street, and violent delinquency. Criminology, 48, 569–605.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). Persistent Poverty in Counties and Census Tracts.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). Poverty in the United States: 2024. Current Population Reports, P60-287.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). The Truly Disadvantaged. University of Chicago Press.

White, C., Dong, B., & colleagues. (2022). Communities, streets, and people: A multi-level study of the correlates of victimization. Victims & Offenders. https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2021.2018079

Primary Web Sources and Data Portals

FBI Crime Data Explorer: https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/

Bureau of Justice Statistics NCVS: https://bjs.ojp.gov/programs/ncvs

CDC Community Violence Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/community-violence/

CDC MMWR YRBS violence exposure study: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/su/su7201a3.htm

National Academies racial inequality report: https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26705/

U.S. Census Bureau poverty publications: https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty.html